WHATEVER HAPPENED TO

FRED HEMBECK DESTROYS THE MARVEL UNIVERSE?

YOU WON'T READ *THIS* IN MARVEL AGE!

SEE PAGE 5 . . . !

STEPHEN KING! BERNI WRIGHTSON! EC!

RAMSEY CAMPBELL

THE BRITISH HORROR MASTER TELLS TALES!

SWAMP THING ARTIST --

TOM YEATES

TALKS ABOUT TIMESPIRITS!

MARVEL'S UNKNOWN INKER

ANDY MUSHYNSKY

FROM THE AGONY OF G.I. JOE TO THE ECSTACY OF THE VISION & SCARLET WITCH!

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS

INTERVIEW

#22

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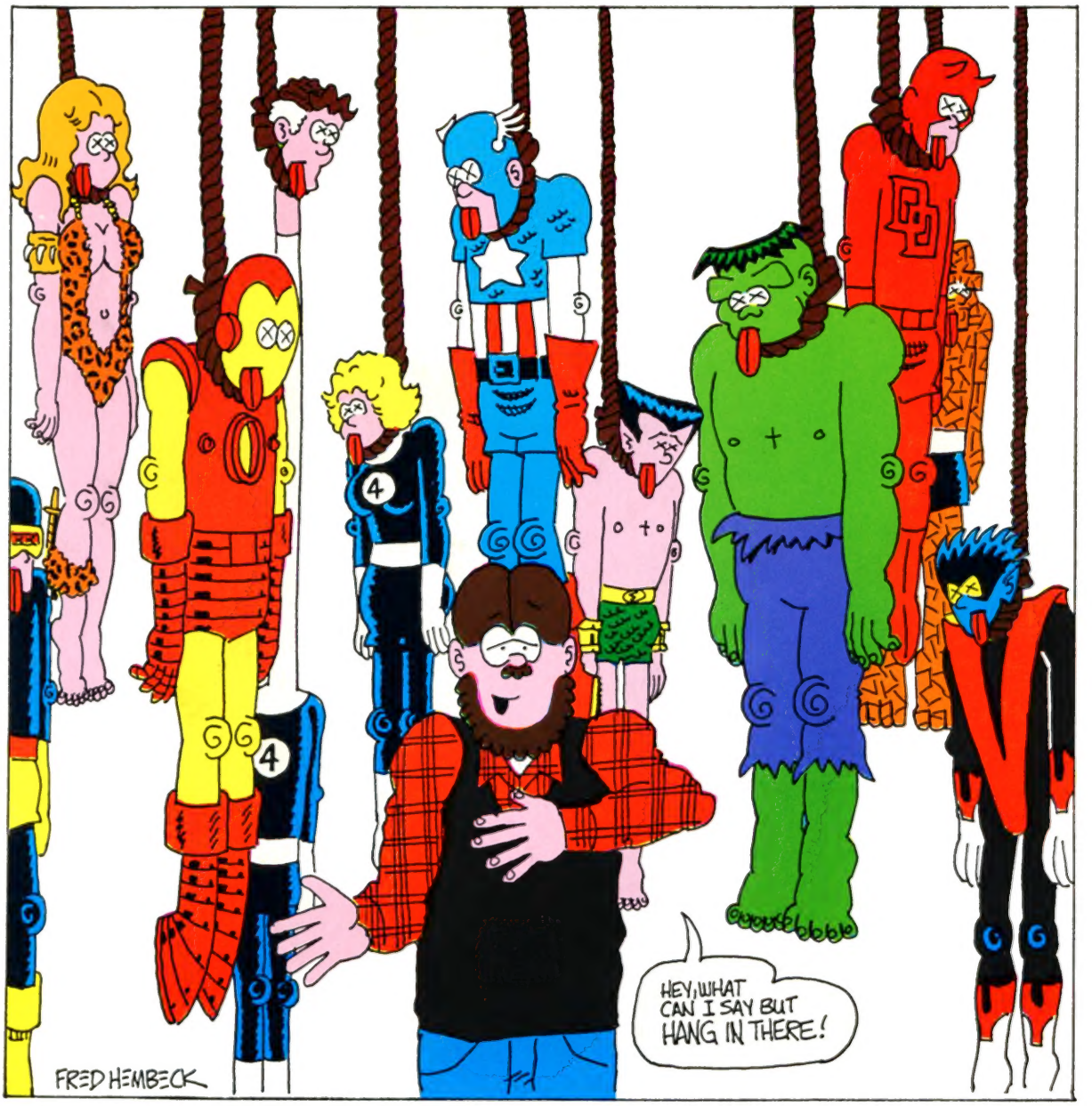

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A FICTIONEER PUBLICATION

I grew up!

But my favorite comic book didn't.

Sure I used to read comics. Just about all my friends did too. Comics were a lot of fun . . . when we were kids.

But the older I got, the more childish those comics became. The plots were the same, month after month. The artwork looked like it had been made in a factory instead of drawn in a studio. I was growing up, but the comic books I read were not.

So I stopped reading them. I left my favorite funny book behind, along with my toys and my childhood.

Then, one day, a friend told me about the new comics. Modern comics. Comics with good art. Full laser-scanned color. Magazine quality white paper. And best of all, these new comics featured new heroes, new concepts, and a new kind of commitment to excellence.

I was amazed. During the time I was gone from comics, they had grown up too. Just like I did.

Yes, I rediscovered comics. But not just any comics. I discovered Eclipse Comics. With the Eclipse logo on the cover, I can be sure that the comics I read are grown up. Just like me.

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RELAX, ELECTRODE!
I AM COMING
STUPID BROAD! HUH? WHAT'S GOING TOO FAR?
AND DON'T YOU DARE BLEED ON ME!
UHHHH
WATCH OUT, WORLD!
ELECTRODE IS BACK IN ACTION!
Southern Knights
DO YOU THINK THEY'LL STILL BE THERE WHEN WE ARRIVE?
I THINK SO. IT SOUNDED LIKE A BIG, TIME CONSUMING OPERATION.
THERE'S A BUS STOP NOW!
THE KNIGHTS HEAD SOUTHEAST...
YOU WON'T FORGET YOU PROMISED TO GO STRETCH!
VRAZZAK!
QUIT WORRYING, SKELETAL! SHE DOES IT ALREADY AROUND.
Southern Knights
YEAH...
WHO TURN?
KRAKA-
BOAK!
THE FINISH THE SOUND OF THAT I'D SAY.
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Southern Knights
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cover contributed by:
FRED HEMBECK

UP FRONT

by FRED HEMBECK

To celebrate April Fool's Day 1985, Marvel Comics had planned to release FRED HEMBECK DESTROYS THE MARVEL UNIVERSE. However, as of late May, there's been no word as to when — or if — the book will actually come out.

Hi. I'm Fred Hembeck, and it sure looks as if the joke's on me. *And* David Kraft! *He's* the one stuck with an extensive interview about a phantom book!

So what happened? You're asking the wrong guy. I completed my share of work on the project (writing and pencilling) back in March or '84, and although both Terry Austin and Al Milgrom were ultimately too busy to complete the inking chores, the obvious next choice, Vince Colletta, was enlisted, and the book was soon physically completed. I know it was. I saw the stats.

Ads began to appear. A shipping date of March 26th was scheduled. And my anticipation level began to run high. But my balloon burst March 1st when I received a phone call from Marvel's Tom DeFalco. It seems as if he and Jim Shooter (Marvel's Editor-In-Chief, and, coincidently, the primary star of FRED HEMBECK DESTROYS THE MARVEL UNIVERSE) had just read the book for the first time, and had major problems with it. Their concern was that the ending alluded a bit too specifically to Jim's old mentor, DC Comics legend Mort Weisinger, and felt it had to be changed before they could publish it. I respectfully declined their invitation to do so for two reasons: 1) 40-plus pages were used to build to a particular punchline, and if you want to change that punchline, you've got to change an awful lot of these 40 plus pages as well; and, more importantly, 2) it was my understanding that Jim had okayed the plot points in question two years earlier in our initial talks regarding this project. I now learn that there was apparently a breakdown in communication at the time that I have only recently been made aware of. See what kind of chaos the break up of AT&T has caused?

So just bear in mind that if the book ever does see the light of day, ol' Fred had some "help", the unsolicited kind.

Me? Well, I just *know* that someday I'm going to look back at all this and laugh. Heck, I'm laughing already. It's the best way to keep from crying.

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Announcing
the JOHN BYRNE Lithograph Series—
A MAJOR COMIC ART EVENT

Marvel's premiere artist, John Byrne, has recently completed a set of six pen and ink illustrations to be offered exclusively as fine art lithographs by Gary Peters Galleries. These are highly limited editions—there will only be five hundred copies of each—and are sure to sell out rapidly due to the high demand expected and the incredible low price of each lithograph.

For Mature Collectors Only...

These lithographs offer everything you've come to admire about the unique Byrne style and something more. Free of the Comics Code censors, John has let his imagination run wild and has created a dazzling array of new fantasy characters—all of them women. Like his famed interpretations of Dark Phoenix, Kitty Pryde, the White Queen, and even the super-strong, yet sensuous She-Hulk, these new characters are unbelievably breath-taking. But, because of the tastefully handled nudity present in these lithographs, we must limit the sale to collectors over eighteen years of age.

The Lithographs...

Gary Peters Galleries will be offering THE JOHN BYRNE LITHOGRAPH SERIES by subscription ($180.00 for all six, reducing the cost of each lithograph to only $30.00) and separately ($40.00 each). The first lithograph is entitled "Galatea," and depicts Byrne's creation—a female cyborg. "Galatea" will be available July 1, 1985. Each lithograph will be produced by one of New York's finest lithographers, the prestigious Geo. Miller & Sons. Printed on the highest quality Arches paper, imported from France, sparing no expense. Each lithograph measures 10 x 14 and is also available framed.

Each Lithograph will be personally signed and numbered by John Byrne.

Don't Delay...

There will only be five hundred copies of each lithograph and when they're gone, they're gone. There will be no reprintings. Numbers will be assigned as we receive orders, with low numbers going to orders received first. Once an edition is sold out, we'll be forced to refund all further orders, or if you request, apply it to the next edition in the series, guaranteeing that you'll receive the next JOHN BYRNE LITHOGRAPH. A subscription ensures that you'll receive all six lithographs, all signed and with the same number.

A Bit of History...

Once upon a time, original Carl Barks' **paintings** were available to collectors for the unbelievably low price of $200.00. Those same paintings, less than fifteen years later, are now purchased by collectors for as much as $10,000.00. Today it costs more to buy a fine art lithograph of one of Barks' paintings than it cost to buy one of his **original** paintings not that long ago. What Barks was to Disney comics, John Byrne is to Marvel comics. Each is a master story-teller and an acclaimed artist.

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Never before has the serious comic art collector or investor had the opportunity to purchase fine art lithographs by a major comic book artist at such a low cost. These are not inexpensive, mass-produced, super hero posters with limited long-term value, but highly collectable lithographs that are signed and numbered personally by John Byrne.

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( ) In sturdy mailing tubes. (At no add'l cost.)
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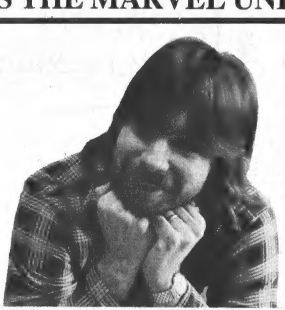
"Actually, my title was JIM SHOOTER DESTROYS THE MARVEL UNIVERSE..."

Photo: Mitch Cohn



FRED HEMBECK

Having won a sizeable following with his cartoons in fanzines, Fred Hembeck's humorously-drawn and wittily-written spoofs of the comics industry are now also appearing under the aegis of Marvel Comics. Marvel published his satirical extravaganza, THE FANTASTIC FOUR ROAST, and Fred's strip (which usually features a cartoony version of himself interviewing various superheroes)appears regularly in MARVEL AGE.

This interview took place less than a month after Fred Hembeck and his wife, Lynn Mots, moved to Kingston, New York. Mitch Cohn helped Fred move his comics collection, so Fred granted Mitch an interview. While they concentrated on his most current work, FRED HEMBECK DESTROYS THE MARVEL UNIVERSE, and the difficulty involved in making death funny, Fred also touched upon what one does after the destruction of the Marvel Universe, as well as anecdotes from his fan career, and a running commentary on everything from the first four-color gay superhero to Fred's dictum to live by . . .

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Fred George Hembeck
Occupation: Cartoonist
Born: 30 January 1953
Residence: Kingston, NY
Training: State University of New York (SUNY) at Farmingdale, and SUNY at Buffalo.
Credits: DATELINE: @!!?*, FRED HEMBECK DESTROYS THE MARVEL UNIVERSE, DIAL H FOR HEMBECK, THE FANTASTIC FOUR ROAST, ABBOTT & COSTELLO MEET THE BRIDE OF HEMBECK.
Favorite Comics Series: LITTLE LULU by John Stanley
Favorite Comedian: Jack Benny
Favorite Sport: Baseball

MITCH COHN: *This is Mitch Cohn, and —*

FRED HEMBECK: — this is **Fred Hembeck!**

MITCH: *We're at his new house overlooking the Hudson River.*

FRED: Well, overlooking Burger King, but that's close.

MITCH: *About a year ago it was reported in the fan press you were going to be doing a book called FRED HEMBECK DESTROYS THE MARVEL UNIVERSE. Is that the actual title?*

FRED: It seems to be, at this point. That wasn't originally the title I suggested, but that's how the book became known.

"There's nothing worse than a funny

MONDAY MORNING IN NEW YORK CITY...AND JIM SHOOTER IS GETTING READY TO JOIN THE DAILY WORK FORCE.
MONDAY MORNING AND THIS MAN IS SMILING?!?...
WHY?
WHY NOT?
AFTER ALL...JIM SHOOTER IS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF MARVEL COMICS AND, AS EVERYONE KNOWS, IT'S ALSO A LOT OF FUN AND ISN'T A SHARE OF SLEEPLESS...
"MORNING JOANA. HAVE A NICE WEEKEND?"
YOU BETCHA! BOSS! OH, AND YOUR MAIL IS HERE WAITING FOR YOU.
THANKS.
ETC.
...ONLY BOING BOING ARE LESS HOSTILE FOR THOSE FUN--!
--THAN THEY ARE FOR THESE SURPRISES!
JIM SHOOTER COMMANDS:
DESTROY THE MARVEL UNIVERSE!
EXCLUSIVE!
LOOK! SHOOT! LEAP! FIGHT!
THE COMICS EXPRESS
AND THIS IS PROBATBLY A CHIP FOR SURPRISES--
--AND NOT A WHOLE LOT OF FUN!

Actually, my title was **JIM SHOOTER DESTROYS THE MARVEL UNIVERSE**, but Jim didn't care for that title. *(Laughter.)* Well, actually, it wasn't so much that *he* didn't care for it, but **Jim Galton** thought that since **Shooter** was an employee of the Marvel Company, he shouldn't be glorifying himself in the title. As an already-established character, I could get away with it. And so he suggested that we make it **FRED HEMBECK DESTROYS THE MARVEL UNIVERSE** — not the more realistic JIM SHOOTER DESTROYS THE MARVEL UNIVERSE.

MITCH: *In other words, they were putting it on your shoulders.*

FRED: Yeah, I guess you could say that — but with no objections on my part.

MITCH: *Well, how did the whole project come about?*

FRED: Well, that's interesting — at least I hope it is. *(Laughter.)* In very early February of 1983, I had gotten my royalty checks from the Marvel book I did, the FANTASTIC FOUR ROAST. And it was only half of what I was entitled to, so I called up **Jim Shooter** and told him as much. He said, "Don't worry about it, it'll be taken care of" — and it was, in less than two weeks — and he asked, "How about doing another project with us?" I said, "Gee, that would be real good, but presently I have to finish a book I'm doing for Fantaco." As soon as I finish that, Jim, I'll call you back." What happened next was I turned thirty years old. And I told myself, "I'm not gonna get upset, I'm not gonna let it bother me" — and it didn't — "my book's done and I'm gonna start a whole new life for myself." Maybe three days later I said, "I'm gonna call up **Jim Shooter** and start a whole new book!" I had this great attitude. Jim asked me, "What would you like to do?" And I said, "I really don't know." So I thought about it for a few days, and I came up with the idea, independent of Jim, to utilize that controversy that had been going on in the fan press — the Big Bang, where Jim was supposedly going to destroy the Marvel Universe and rework it in his own image. This was reported by **Cat Yronwode** quoting **Doug Moench**, who had just left Marvel and caused a big brouhaha in fandom. I thought to myself, "This might be a topic to use." And then I thought, "No, I don't think I'll use that," and I thought of a few other things, but nothing really hit me. I called up Jim and said, "Well, do you have any ideas?" And he said, "Yeah, why don't you do something about this Big Bang controversy that's been going on — maybe you can make something funny out of that." And I said, "Hey, you know, I had actually thought of that, but I didn't think you'd be interested in putting out a book about that." He said, "No, I think you could do it, so why don't you do something along those lines — The Destruction of the Marvel Universe." And that's how it actually came about. Next question?

MITCH: *Do you think the Big Bang has actually come to pass? Thor is no longer Don Blake, She-Hulk is in the Fantastic Four, Spider-Man has a new costume —*

FRED: Right.

MITCH: *My God, they did it and nobody noticed it!* (Laughter.)

FRED: You forgot Iron Man. Iron Man is no longer Tony Stark.

MITCH: *I didn't forget. There's a whole lot more.*

FRED: Well, at least no one was killed off. Certainly a lot has happened in the last year, and I'll be the first to admit it. But I'm taking the situation and making up a wholly fictional storyline, in which one day **Jim Shooter** walks in and opens up a fanzine and sees, "**Jim Shooter** To Destroy the Marvel Universe — Hot Scoop." It's nowhere like what really happened. There isn't any thinly disguised **Cat Yronwode** character.

MITCH: *It was about a year ago that you talked to Shooter about doing the book. John Byrne can do twelve issues of ALPHA FLIGHT in a year, plus twelve issues of FANTASTIC FOUR —*

comic book that isn't funny. (Laughter.)"

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FRED: Please. I don't want to hear it.
MITCH: *Why has it taken so long?*
FRED: Well, concurrently with being asked to do FRED HEMBECK DESTROYS THE MARVEL UNIVERSE, I was asked to do an issue of SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN during Assistant Editors' month, and since that was a book that had a deadline, it got preferential treatment when the time came. But beyond that — yes! — there are other reasons. First of all, this book is actually two books in one. It's a book about Marvel and it's a book featuring the Marvel characters. The book about Marvel — which is the beginning — is the story of how **Jim Shooter** comes to the point of wanting to destroy the Marvel characters. At the end of the book that story is wrapped up and tied in with the middle part of the story, which is where all the heroes, or most of them, are killed off. When I started this book I had an idea of how to approach the **Jim Shooter**/Marvel Bullpen storyline. But the other part, where I wanted to kill off all these characters in a humorous way, I soon realized, it wasn't going to be easy to do: death is the funny part of the book. I was in the midst of preparing ideas for that middle section, when all of a sudden my mom, who lives down on Long Island, became real sick, and got rushed to the hospital. My mom and my dad have never been in a hospital in my entire life, that I can recall. So it was a big shock. For about two or three weeks I couldn't really concentrate on the title I was working on. As it turned out, Mom died, which really put a wet blanket on the whole concept. So I just put it aside and didn't work on it — although I did work on the beginning part of the book — and then it became time for the SPIDER-MAN book. I was working on that for a long time and nothing was coming along on the famous death sequence. Generally, when I have worked in the past on material you've seen everywhere and elsewhere, it's stuff that I have in my head and get down on paper almost as fast as possible. Hardly ever do I have to rewrite or redraw it. It generally comes very spontaneously and instinctually, but with the death section of this book, I must have re-written it about six or seven times. I had about ten pages of layouts that I must have thrown away. I saved a few sequences here and there but I had to revamp the concept over and over again because it just wasn't funny. And I didn't want to put out a book that wasn't funny because there's nothing worse than a funny comic book that isn't funny. *(Laughter.)* No, **really, it's glaring.** You can put out a bad adventure comic and it just seems mediocre. But if you put out a comic that is supposed to be funny and it doesn't make you laugh, it just seems plain bad. So, that's the reason why I didn't do it for the longest time. It finally seemed to all come together after I did the initial twelve pages starring **Jim Shooter** and his adventures. Oh, and that's another important thing to mention, too. Although the book takes place a great deal in the Marvel Bullpen, this is not going to be like Assistant Editors' month, hopefully, because you see, I don't know anything about what's going on there. I didn't use actual people in the Bullpen. I used **Jim Shooter**, who's kind of the star of the book, I'm in a supporting role, there's a short cameo by **Stan Lee**, and that's it. Then you have these three characters that I made up — Bruce, Clark and Diana.
MITCH: *Bruce, Clark and Diana!* (Laughter.) *You thought you could just get that one right by me, didn't you? Bruce Wayne, Clark Kent and Diana Prince?*
FRED *(innocently):* What a coincidence! I'd never have thought of that! Anyway, you have the woman who's the wise secretary, the egotistical writer, and the stupid gopher. They interplay with **Jim Shooter**, and it got to the point where I enjoyed them so much that I started writing jokes for them and they sort of started taking over their sequences. But getting back to the death-of-the-superheroes section, I finally came up with the title — "When Titans Croak." That was what I was working on in late Fall, and while it was still pretty difficult to do, I think I came up with some pretty humorous deaths . . . if you can believe that. The one drawback was, unlike the FANTASTIC FOUR ROAST where I featured all the major characters, I found that not all major characters lent themselves to what I felt was a funny death. *(Laughter.)* So I ended up using some major characters and avoiding other ones, and also using some minor characters.

Now, to leaven the gloominess of death, death, death and more death, I utilized the characters after they were dead, and made them ghosts. And there's an interplay between the ghost characters and the

Preview: All artwork accompanying this interview is from FRED HEMBECK DESTROYS THE MARVEL UNIVERSE.

HERE--TAKE A LOOK AT THIS.
COLLECT GRITS!! BACK ISSUES AVAILABLE!
...UNBELIEVABLE...
WHY, THAT'S INCREDIBLE...
WHAT A GREAT IDEA, BOSS! WHEN DO WE START?

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"Death is the funny part of the book."

live characters. Okay — I've come to the end of that answer.

MITCH: *Have you?*

FRED: I think so.

MITCH: *Did you find that the death that's happened in your own life interfered with coming up with funny deaths?*

FRED: It impaired it, especially at first, but it's not an easy task in any respect.

MITCH: *No, I wouldn't think so.*

FRED: But, of course, as you know, there's what I call the Curse of the Book, which is rather tacky —

MITCH: *It is!* (Laughter.)

FRED: Nonetheless — I turned the book into twelve-page sequences, and the initial twelve pages had brought the Marvel Bullpen in and was not that gloomy. Then my Mom had died. Now it was a number of months after that that I got into the death section of the book, and the very day I completed the first twelve pages of "When Titans Croak," and was taking it down to the post office, I got a call that my friend — our friend — **Raoul Vezina**, the cartoonist, had died very unexpectedly, at a very young age, and it really took me aback. You have to realize that I have a very small family and all my friends have managed to survive up to this point. The last time I had had to deal with "heavy death" was when I was 13 and my grandmother died. Since then it's been all free and clear. But then, while working on this book, on top of my mom dying, here my friend Raoul dies. That was when I thought there might be a curse on this book. I guess I've read too many comic books. *(Laughter.)* The next thing I know was one of my cats got hit by a car. As it happened she turned up alive but it was still a brush with death. And a couple of days later you were on a trip to Hartford, Connecticut, for a comic-book show, when your car got totaled. You got out of that okay, but it was kind of scary. Then, as I was finishing the third twelve-page sequence, just as I was about to work on the last two panels of it, I get a frantic phone call from my mother-in-law that her husband had been rushed to the hospital and it looked like his time had run out. As it turned out, that didn't happen, but for a week there it was kind of close. So, it's just been one after another, and at this point I'm just wondering if I'm going to survive the final twelve pages — or the publication of it. I hope to be around when this interview — and the book — are published, and if not, I want my story told, and I want it told here. If I die, I'm gonna get on the cover for sure! *(Laughter.)* But don't worry, suicide is not an option. I'm hoping for good luck in the future. *But* — bear in

I ALWAYS DID WANT TO GO DOWN IN COMIC BOOK HISTORY, AND DESTROYING THE MARVEL UNIVERSE IS ONE SURE WAY TO DO IT.
OF COURSE, IT'S NOT AS GOOD AS CREATING THE MARVEL UNIVERSE, BUT IT'S A START.

mind: it's a good book. It's a funny book. I just wish it hadn't taken this long. You were speaking earlier about the Big Bang Theory, where everything was going to be changed at Marvel. Since I've taken so long at this, everything *has* changed at Marvel! *(Laughter.)*

MITCH: *Is there a fantasy element in the book?*

FRED: Oh, a lot of fantasy. There has to be fantasy in it. It's funny that I chose to call the dimension where the ghosts take up residence, the Beyond, and I was really happy to read MARVEL SECRET WARS #1 and find that the Big Villain is the Beyonder. Also Spider-Man's in a new costume — I didn't know he was going to get a new costume! But it's a great book. What's the next question?

MITCH: *Who are the characters that are featured?*

FRED: They range from — well, you see, it's done in vignette form, with a character having anything from a page to a page-and-a-half to three pages to have his own individual death scene. This is not a cosmic thing where somebody eats 'em all up. Somebody might be at home watching television when they get it. We go from the minor characters — Ant Man, Captain Marvel — to the major — Spider-Man, the Fantastic Four . . .

MITCH: *You mean all the characters die?*

FRED: By the end of "When Titans Croak," all the Marvel super-heroes and super-villains are dead — even though you don't see every death scene. I created a death-type character to kill them all. He looks like Bozo with a skull-face. And he's wearing a shroud with circles of color on it. He's Crackers, the Clown Prince of Death. That's a tribute to Crackers the Clown from the old Superman TV show.

MITCH: *So who's featured prominently in the book?*

FRED: There are individual scenes of Ant Man, Captain Marvel, Daredevil, a nice three-page sequence of the Fantastic Four which is one of my favorites. Doctor Doom is in there also. We get to see the face beneath the Doctor Doom mask for the first time. We get the Kingpin and the Juggernaut together for the first time. The X-Men are in there. The Hulk is there. Spider-Man plays a big part. There are a number of others who don't readily come to mind. But there's a good deal of mayhem — humorous mayhem. No Galactus. I decided to stay away from cosmic entities. We do see the destruction of Asgard, however.

MITCH: *What have been the influences on you in the writing of this book — and in your other work, too?*

FRED: Well, as you know I'm a big comics fan, and for many many years I've been reading comics. But I find that there

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"I created Crackers, Clown Prince of Death."

aren't really that many funny comic books — ones I consider funny — although my writing smacks a bit of **Stan Lee** and he would be a big influence, I guess. Among people in comics I have been influenced most by, would be **John Stanley**, who wrote LITTLE LULU. There was also **Fred Toole**, who wrote the DENNIS THE MENACE stories in the Sixties that I thought were very, very funny. But more and more I realize that my writing comes not so much from comic books but from television. Because I've grown up on television and there's nothing I like to watch more on television than a good situation comedy — not just any situation comedy, but the classics: SGT. BILKO, DICK VAN DYKE, MARY TYLER MOORE . . . I enjoy CHEERS very much —

MITCH: *M*A*S*H?*

FRED: Yeah, that's a good one, but it's never been one of my top favorites. I find that I can't watch it over and over again about five or six times — that's the real test — like I LOVE LUCY. BURNS AND ALLEN was very good.

MITCH: *LEAVE IT TO BEAVER?*

FRED: LEAVE IT TO BEAVER! *(Laughter.)* Of course! My favorite co-median over the years, I've discovered, is **Jack Benny**, and I've been watching the reruns of his shows on the Christian Broadcasting Network. It didn't convert me but I did watch the show. *(Laughter.)* So they got something out of me in any event. I find that a lot of my humor is quite akin to **Jack Benny**. I hadn't realized that, because I hadn't seen the shows for ten or fifteen years, but I used to really enjoy him when I was a kid, and I see that more and more now. In fact, there are a couple of scenes in the new book which are direct *hommages* —

MITCH: *Swipes?* (Laughter.)

FRED: Well, it's a *hommage* and it's a swipe. Pay particular attention to the Daredevil sequences. **Mel Blanc** would love it, let me put it that way. But I find that most of my writing is influenced by what I consider good situation comedy writing. And I try to bring that to my comic. And I try to bring timing to my work because timing is very important in comedy. You can see that in **Jack Benny** especially. And that's why I think that most of the comic books that have been supposed to be funny in the last couple of years haven't been funny. The jokes might have been there, and the funny drawings might have been there, but the timing was missing. They would just try to pack jokes and puns into a panel without focusing on, the reaction which is necessary for the jokes to go over big. So I'm hoping that my stuff, which people have responded well to in the past, will amuse them and entertain them in the years to come.

MITCH: *There really isn't much being done in the humor genre as far as color comics goes. There's GROO —*

FRED: Yes, and there's the ARCHIE comics which also have a good writer there by the name of **Frank Doyle**. The things he did in the Sixties with an artist named **Harry Lucey** are some of the funniest stories I have read in comics. But by and large I haven't really cared too much for these so-called funny comics. I never did like funny comics, except for the ones I mentioned. It's very strange. I never liked funny comics and wouldn't collect them as a kid. And on television I won't watch dramatic programs — unless it's something real good like HILL STREET BLUES or LOU GRANT. You know, it's like if I want action I'll read a comic book and if I want comedy I'll watch TV. I'm trying to get good comedy into comic books. I don't think there's as much of a chance of getting good adventure on TV, so I'll do the best I can.

MITCH: *AMERICAN FLAGG is not a humor book, but it has a good sense of humor. And so do the Miller issues of DAREDEVIL.*

FRED: Yes, that's right. There's been some good humor in the straight comics in the last year or so. I've enjoyed some of **Roger Stern's** turns at levity. There were also some humorous moments in NEXUS and THE BADGER. You know, when these adventure writers realize they shouldn't take themselves too seriously, some of them turn out some funny stuff. It'd be interesting to see what some of them would be like if they turned completely to humor. I'd really like to see **Frank Miller** do a wholly humorous comic. I think he could do it. He's made me laugh a number of times.

MITCH: *There've been a number of*

CALL ME CRACKERS! CRACKERS, CROWN PRINCE OF DEATH!
...HEH...
"WHY THE CLOWN GET UP? WELL, LOOK AT IT THIS WAY: LIFE IS JUST ONE LONG ELABORATE SET UP; AND DEATH? WHY, DEATH IS THE ULTIMATE PUNCH LINE, OF COURSE!
"HEY, WHO SAYS I DON'T HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOR?

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FRED HEMBECK

"I felt a little presumptuous in join-

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humorous moments in RONIN. On another subject, do you have a copyright on your own character?

FRED: Yes, I do — wherever he appears, he has a little copyright with him . . . although I don't seen why anyone would want him. *(Laughter.)* Now, you've brought up an interesting anecdote by asking me that question, Mitch. I have to applaud you. They can cut this out when they edit the interview but I'm going to tell it anyway. First time I met **Jim Shooter** — this sounds like an expose article — was at a Creation Convention. He had just taken over the reins as editor-in-chief at Marvel, and I, myself, had just started doing my comics commentary strip in the BUYER'S GUIDE, and one of the first five or six things I had done was praising the then-current storyline in THE AVENGERS, which **Jim Shooter** had been writing. So I walked over to him and introduced myself and told him who I was, and he was immediately pleased to see me, because he's always been a fan of mine. It's always been his idea for me to do these books, and that's always been very good for me. In any event, we got to talking, and since Jim is real good at that, I got to listen. There were other fans who came over and they were standing around — and you gotta remember this was in the days even before EPIC MAGAZINE was out — and at one point Jim was talking about how there's a whole new world coming in comics, where we would pay the creator of a feature and we'd publish it and it would be good for everybody, and he turned to me and said, "For instance, we could license **Fred Hembeck** and put out a comic about him," or something along those lines. And I smiled and thought, "Come on, Jim — that day will never come." I didn't believe it. Well, it's happened. Not that I'm the actual star of the book, but I never would have believed that it would come to pass. Yet it did. Life is just like a fairy tale. Next question. *(Laughter.)*

MITCH: *You were very prominent in the FANTASTIC FOUR roast.*

FRED: I must mention that in both instances, Jim encouraged me to put my character in the book. I felt a little presumptuous in the first instance joining all those Marvel characters — I mean, this guy, who needs him? But it was more natural in this book. I didn't think twice about it. Jim was the one who suggested it, in both cases. You may proceed. I didn't mean to interrupt.

MITCH: *Go right ahead. Interrupt all you want. That's what interviews are all about. How was the reaction to the FANTASTIC FOUR book?*

FRED: Very good, as far as I could tell. People who came up to me at conventions seemed to be very happy with it. I only saw one small review, so I don't know how it went over with the guys at THE COMICS JOURNAL, but I guess I can sleep at night without knowing that. It seemed to go over okay — okay enough for Jim to ask me to do another one. But here's the problem I have with these two books — and I vowed never to do this again — in both cases you have these two all-encompassing casts of characters. "Put everybody in the Marvel Universe in these books, Fred." " Okay, I will."

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ing all those Marvel characters."

Now think about the guys who are doing the individual books month in and month out. They're doing a pop quiz and I'm doing my major thesis. So I thought the next time I did a book like this it was going to feature only one or two major characters — no more than that. 'Cause that was what made it difficult, trying to figure out how to fit everybody in. It's not an easy task.

MITCH: *Didn't one of the artists on the FANTASTIC FOUR ROAST change your layout?*

FRED: Most of the artists on that book were very good in following my layouts and putting down what I suggested. But there was one who changed a couple of groups at a table. Whenever I had a group, they sort of made sense, like Ant Man, Yellow Jacket and Black Goliath, all sort of spawned from the same origin. He removed one of them and put in Valkyrie, which kind of killed the joke. But otherwise I was very pleased with the artwork that was done on the book. I was kind of suprised how closely the artists followed my layouts. I thought they would interpret them more. It was strange writing that book. Because I sent them the layouts before I had all the jokes written, and they sent me back the artwork out of sequence. So I had to write the book out of sequence over pages that were fully pencilled and inked. It was kind of a triple-backwards way of working on it. Now I'm really surprised it flows so smoothly considering the way it was done. Not that I'm complaining, mind you. So, I was very pleased with the way that book came out. But I did hear people say, "Yeah, it was funny, but a lot of it would have looked better if Fred himself had drawn it." I could see what they meant because a couple of the artists, try as they may, didn't have a humorous art style, and it didn't come off quite as funny as it could have. There were a number of pages where the art style didn't quite work. So that's why when I did this new book I wanted to do the art, too, even though my art is . . . well, it's okay, but my inking is lousy, so that's why I said, "No inking."

MITCH: *Your other mainstream work that you did at the same time was your contribution to the SPIRIT JAM, which consisted of pages collaborated on with Denis Kitchen who, as you pointed out to me, is unbelievably meticulous with the zip-a-tone —*

FRED: Yes, I was amazed. He really saved that page, artistically. Because when

MEANWHILE, DEATH'S DIRTY WORK GOES ON...
LET'S SEE, I'VE TAKEN CARE OF THE DEFENDERS, THE NEW MUTANTS, THE BROTHER AND SISTERHOOD OF EVIL MUTANTS, CYCLOPS, PROFESSOR X HIMSELF--ALL I HAVE LEFT OF THE MUTANT POPULATION ARE XAVIER'S SIX PRIZE PUPILS, SNOOZING AWAY PEACEFULLY IN HIS MANSION--
"THERE'S STORM...
"...ARIEL...
"...COLOSSUS...
"...ROGUE...
"...NIGHTCRAWLER...
"...AND--AW, ISN'T HE CUTE?--WOLVERINE.

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"Superheroes are really kinda dumb."

I turned it in, it turned out not that great. I was not pleased, personally, with my own work. The content was okay, but I guess I didn't care for the inking. However, I turned it in and the next thing I know it was all super-duper zip-a-toned up by Denis, and it really looked better than when I turned it in. That was really nice. It was a real thrill working on the SPIRIT JAM, one of the biggies for me. I've been a lucky guy. I got a button, "I was in the SPIRIT JAM," and a letter from **Will Eisner**, thanking me. I was a little upset when the artists they announced for the line-up — real heavyweights — didn't come close to working on it.

MITCH: *Such as?*

FRED: I believe they had **Robert Crumb** originally going to be involved in it. And I always wondered why people like **Wally Wood** weren't involved. Of course, that was before he died. He died before I did my book, so you can't blame that on me. *(Laughter.)* These comments are going to look pretty tacky in print. But that's okay. I'll chance it.

MITCH: *You've had a lot of different publishers in your professional career, you've been carried in quite a number of fanzines*

FRED: True, true.

MITCH: *— you've been published by the BUYER'S GUIDE —*

FRED: Back when **Alan Light** owned it. **Alan Light** was my first publisher.

MITCH: *How did that come about?*

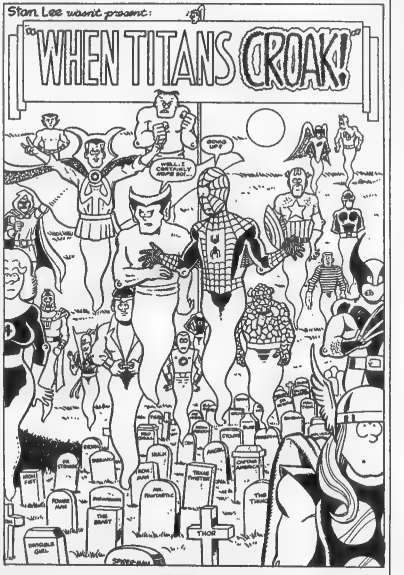
FRED: Out of desparation. I was trying to get into comics as a super-hero artist, and **Vinnie Colletta**, who was art director at DC at the time, didn't like my samples. Vinnie said, "You'll never make it in comics." And I thought, "Whoops! Maybe he's right." I went home with my tail between my legs. At Marvel I just left my book and, you know, they just gave it back to me the next day. They didn't have a personal interview. I had been messing around with this humorous style that I had never really utilized in the past, and so I came up with this little interview format, and created the character of Fred, not expecting it to become quasi-famous, such as it is. And I sent the thing to **Alan Light**, back in the days when fanzines didn't pay and there weren't half a dozen on the newsstands. And he printed it and I was really surprised. That was one of the big moments in my life, seeing it in the BUYER'S GUIDE. He didn't write me a letter of acceptance, saying it was great. It was just all of a sudden in print. I later got a letter from him saying, "Send more," and I did. It kind of grew from there. I was approached by **Dean Mullaney** of Eclipse Enterprises to put together a full collection, which we did —

MITCH: *That was in Dean's early days, wasn't it?*

FRED: Yes. The very first thing they did was the **SABRE** graphic novel by **Don McGregor** and **Paul Gulacy**, and the second thing was **HEMBECK: THE BEST OF DATELINE: @!!?#.**

MITCH: *What year was that?*

FRED: Oh, gosh, 1979. The follow-up was going to be called **HEMBECK: 1980. That was published by Fantaco, because Dean was having some problems** at that point keeping Eclipse going, so we all thought it best that I publish the book elsewhere. Fantaco was the comics store in Albany, and I had just moved into the next city — Troy, New York — the people there were planning on publishing **Raoul Vezina's** SMILIN' ED COMICS, so I went up to Albany with a book all ready to go, and since it had been agreed that Eclipse wouldn't publish it, they said, "Okay, we'll publish it." And so they did. That led to a profitable association which resulted in a subsequent — what? — six books? Some collections, some original material. They don't seem to be publishing any more, and I probably will be gearing my major work for the color publishers anyway, because the work I had done in the past was dealing mainly with comics criticism and nostalgia and the like, and while I might want to do a little of that, what I'd really like to do is



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"There should be more sex in comics and less violence."

something with characters that are free and clear of being copyrighted under other people's names. Because, yes, I want my own monthly Epic comic! Hey, everyone's getting one these days, so why don't I have one? No, I'm just kidding. Sorta.

MITCH: *You want to do stories?*

FRED: Yeah, I want to do stories. I'm just kidding about the Epic comic. Although if that came about, that would be good. But since I only do one comic a year, I don't think they'd like that kind of schedule. *(Laughter.)*

MITCH: *What kind of stories?*

FRED: Situation comedies on paper without super-heroes. That's what I want to do. Because you know what happened last year? Not only did all those terrible things happen to me which we were talking about earlier in the interview, but at age 30 I finally realized that super-heroes are really kinda dumb, and comics shouldn't be full of them. You see, five or six years ago, I expected to read super-heroes for the rest of my life because I thought comics weren't going to go any further than that. But then the big alternative explosion came about and professionals were allowed to do whatever they wanted. And it seems what they wanted to do was super-heroes, over and over again — and space-opera and STAR WARS and X-MEN rip-offs — and I got kinda tired of reading that about the sixth or seventh time through. And I realized that there were a handful of really good comics — LOVE AND ROCKETS, AMERICAN FLAGG, JOURNEY, and stuff like that, beyond the super-hero mold — that showed me that you didn't need super-heroes to have a good comic. I really would like to do something without super-heroes in the future. However, I will still be doing super-heroes because I have a regular page in MARVEL AGE *(Laughter.)* Yeah, I know — that kind of trips me right up.

MITCH: *You gonna keep doing that every issue?*

FRED: Every issue, kinda basing it on the topic of every issue. Some issues I won't use super-heroes but I'll be using Marvel Bullpen personnel, like the third one I did featured Chris Claremont and Jim Shooter. I also did the inside cover, front and back, for the second DC Sampler, featuring Perry White, Jimmy Olsen and Lois Lane and Clark Kent, and I'll be doing the cover for the third one, and I hope to be doing some stuff for the BUYER'S GUIDE in the future, as well. But yeah, I'd like to get away from super-heroes. Wouldn't you like to get away from super-heroes?

MITCH: *Definitely.*

FRED: Although some of the super-hero comics that are coming out now are as well done as super-hero comics have ever been done, at least over the last ten or twenty years. There's some real stand-out stuff. But my point is: why create new, bad super-heroes? There should be a super-hero freeze No more super-heroes. Just those we have now, and anything that comes out in the future can't be super-heroes, or barbarians, or —

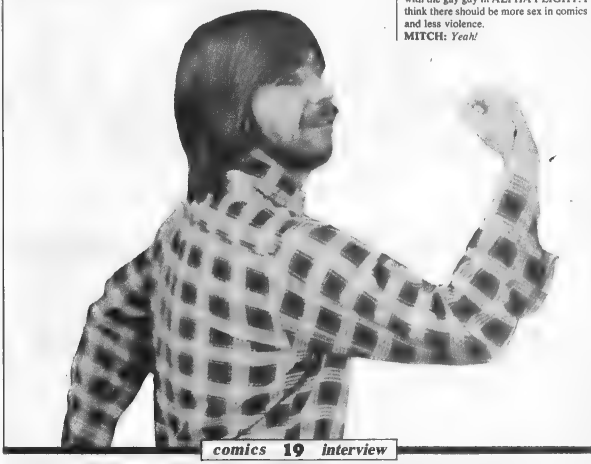
MITCH: *Unless it's exceptional.*

FRED: Yeah.

MITCH: *For example, ALPHA FLIGHT John Byrne snuck in the first gay super-hero.*

FRED: Yeah, it's amazing, and he did it very subtly. One good thing about comics in the Eighties, is that even the mainstream companies realize that there is sexuality in this life, and in comic-book life, with AMERICAN FLAGG being a super-hero/super-stud kind of guy, and with the gay guy in ALPHA FLIGHT. I think there should be more sex in comics and less violence.

MITCH: *Yeah!*



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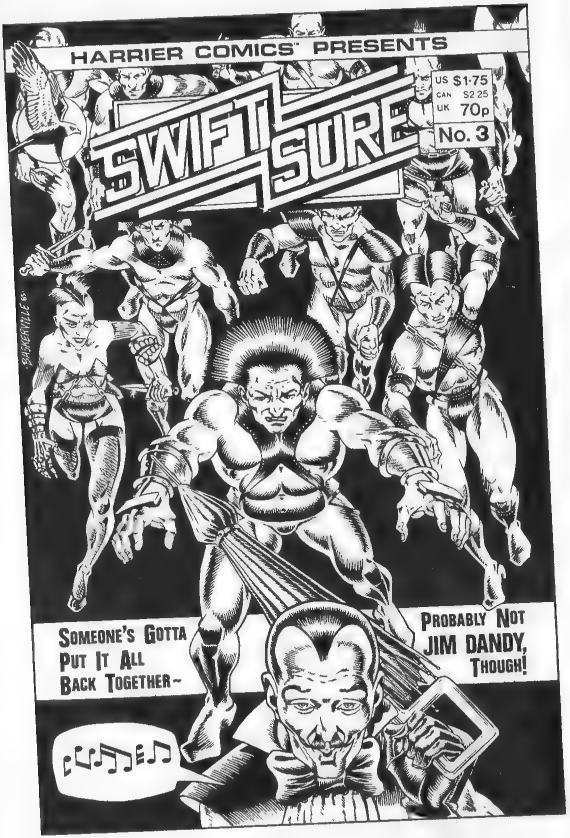

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"More sex. Less violence. And lots of jokes."

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FRED: I think that's a good dictum to live by. More sex and less violence.

MITCH: *I think we can all live with that.* (Laughter.) *More soap opera, too.*

FRED: Soap opera is good. I don't watch action-adventure shows but I must admit to enjoying ALL MY CHILDREN.

MITCH: *It certainly has the best use of irony.*

FRED: Yeah, it's a great show. If they put half those characters in costumes, comic-book fans would eat it up.

MITCH: *Comic writers could learn a lot from watching ALL MY CHILDREN.*

FRED: Very true.

MITCH: *The ones that aren't that good, anyway — which is to say, most of the writers.*

FRED: You've made a good point there. One of the main criticisms of comic books I have today is that while there is certainly no scarcity of exceptional artists, there's really a very small supply of exceptional writers. There's a lot of halfway decent writers — but, you know, there are only a handful of writers who are, say, as good at writing as **Berni Wrightson** is at illustrating.

MITCH: *It seems a lot of the best writers are artists — Byrne, Miller, Chaykin . . .*

FRED: I think that the best comics are produced by one person, with maybe an inker helping. Which is not to denigrate inkers. I'm just saying one person in the conceptual stage. When you split that stage up among different people, it's a compromise, and compromises are generally — with certain exceptions — not as good as one total vision. Boy, that sounded good. Maybe I can write it in THE COMICS JOURNAL. *(Laughter.)* Next question.

MITCH: *What are your plans for the future?*

FRED: My dismal thirtieth year is over, and I'm looking forward to the big Thirty-One. I'm going to be doing some shorter stories, no more of these forty-eight page monsters. I just want to do a few four- or five-page stories. I don't want to predict where they'll turn up, but they *will* turn up. Plus the regular feature in MARVEL AGE and hopefully the CBG. Hey, I usually do what people ask me. I'm pretty good that way. So if anyone wants something, give me a call. *(Laughter.)* Wait a minute, this is becoming an advertisement.

MITCH: *Getting back to FRED HEMBECK DESTROYS THE MARVEL UNIVERSE, your wife, Lynn Moss, has appeared in a number of your previous books. Is she in this book?*

FRED: No, I haven't utilized her too much in my Marvel work. I guess I thought that would be a little presumptuous, since I feel slightly presumptuous appearing in the stories myself. Lynn did appear in my E-MAN Hostess Twinkie parody. That was her claim to fame. But I've enjoyed using her in the past because it's fun to write our characters. When I was first writing my character, it was pretty much a mouthpiece for what I wanted to say. But as I became more and more involved in stories with these characters they took on a life of their own. They're built around the real Fred and Lynn, but the real Fred and Lynn are not responsible for what the comic characters say and do. One has to exaggerate for effect at times. In other words, we're not really that goofy. Although people who know Lynn think she writes her own dialogue, but no, it's my reflection of her, and I guess I know her pretty well. Because she's a wonderful person, and definitely a great deal of inspiration has come from her. She's about the best thing that ever happened to me. I like her better than comic books. That's the highest compliment I can give something.

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I'LL BE THERE.
YOU WANTED TO SEE ME, BOSS?
FRED HEMBECK IS COMING IN WITH THAT SECRET PROJECT WE DISCUSSED.
SINCE I'LL BE LEAVING SOON FOR... AN INDEFINITE PERIOD OF TIME, I'M MAKING IT YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO SEE TO IT THAT HIS BOOK IS PUBLISHED, NO MATTER WHAT.
NO MATTER WHAT? YOU GOT THAT, CLARK?

MITCH: *"Someone."* (Laughter.)

FRED: Yeah, well . . . A digression here: I say "something" because . . . well, I guess I should've said "someone." Never mind. Let's go on to the next question. But, no, Lynn is a wonderful person.

MITCH: *And she's your wife.*

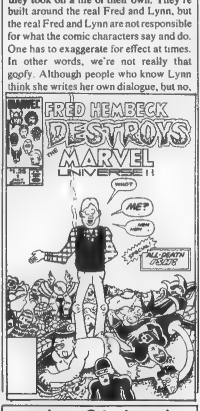
FRED: And she's my wife. She probably will appear in another comic sooner or later. I would like to do comics where we don't appear so I could really go wild. 'Cause sometimes people ask, "Would Fred really do that?" Some people are going to assume that everything the Fred character does is something I would do. And so I have to quash a few good jokes now and again.

MITCH: *Feeling you were vulnerable, huh?*

FRED: Feeling I was vulnerable. People wouldn't think it was funny if I was smothering baby kittens, but I had this great joke . . . *(Laughter.)* No, no, we're just kidding here. This is a joke, folks. *(Pause.)* What else? Next question.

MITCH: *I think that's about it.*

FRED: I guess so. Maybe I should recite my statement of principles at the end. "More sex, less violence." That's how I live my life. And lots of jokes. Because everything is funny. I've enjoyed being here. Thank you, **David Anthony Kraft.** Thank you, Mitch, and thank you all. Good night, and drive safely.



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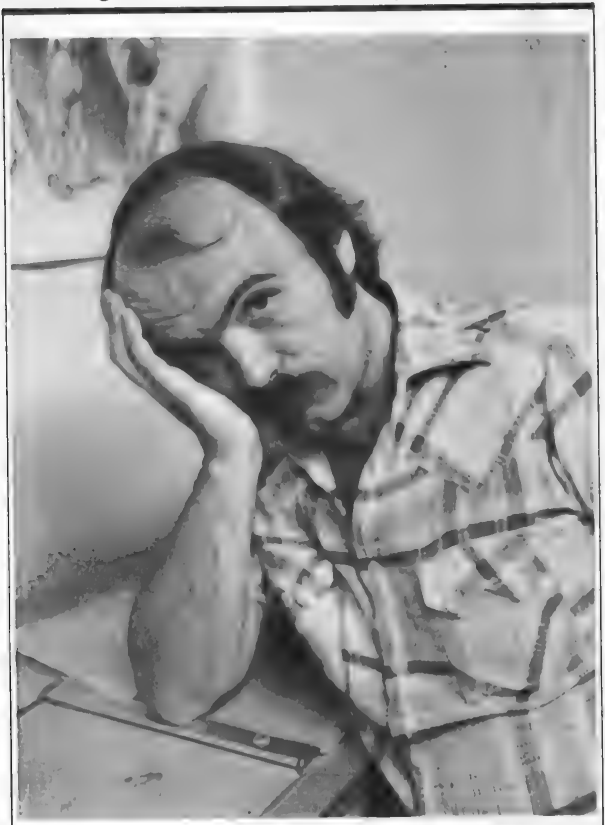
"G.I. JOE is about detail, about hard-



ware, and about hundreds of characters."

ANDY MUSHYNSKY

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VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Andy Mushynsky.
Born: 17 December 1948 — Augsburg, West Germany. Augsburg is named after the Roman emperor, Augustus; it's one of the oldest cities in Europe.
Residence: Brooklyn, NY.
Story Credits: Various short pieces for the DC mystery books; CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN; the brief revival of TOMAHAWK; THE DEFENDERS; THE INCREDIBLE HULK; POWER MAN AND IRON FIST; G.I.JOE; THE THING; THE VISION AND SCARLET WITCH mini-series.

Training: Graduated 1970 Colgate University, Phi Beta Kappa.

Favorite Books: Science fiction, mysteries, the Lou Archer books, Travis McGee novels; I seem to enjoy series that I can come back to and feel comfortable with.

Favorite Play: Most recently, THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE, on Broadway with Linda Ronstadt and Rex Smith. Excellent staging and great fun to watch.

Favorite Recent Movie: WITNESS. Just saw it last week — terrific movie, directed by Peter Weir.

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"Jack Abel had one of his stories swiped by Roy Lichtenstein, the pop artist."

DWIGHT ZIMMERMAN: *You have an unusual name . . .*

ANDY MUSHYNSKY: Well, I have to say that I shortened my name — from Andreas Vasylovych Muszyskyj — which is a tough number for any letterer to fit in the credits. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *When we were talking in the Bullpen some time back, you mentioned the fact that you were born in West Germany. Do you have any memories of that time, or did your family move to the States too early for you to remember?*

ANDY: My parents were living in a Displaced Persons Camp in Augsburg, Germany, when I was born in 1948. We left for America a couple of years later, so I'm afraid not. My mother was German and my father was Ukranian and they told me that life in the Camp was really tough. I was real sickly, and there was not much food available. My parents were worried about just surviving. My dad was an artist and he told me that he would do portraits of the G.I.s and get paid for his work in cartons of American cigarettes. Then he'd trade them in the black market for food to feed us. our surroundings were really pretty drab, from what they said, and they were worried about me because I was so listless and sick. One day, my dad — to sort of brighten things up for me — taped some American funnies on the inside of my crib. Apparently, it was the only color in the place. Those comics livened the crib up and cheered me up a lot. So my exposure to comics happened at a very early age and had a very beneficial effect as well.

DWIGHT: *When you were later growing up in New York City, did you have any plans to become an artist?*

ANDY: I was always drawing when I was a kid — cartoon characters and things like that. Drawing was a great outlet and a great escape for quite a while, up through high school.

DWIGHT: *Were you involved in athletics?*

ANDY: No, not at all. Instead, I was very involved in acting and theatre. I put the artwork aside for a while and became deeply involved in theatre during high school, college and a little bit beyond college. In high school we were lucky enough to have a drama instructor who wanted to go beyond doing just musicals. We did plays by **Ionesco, Sean O'Casey, Edward Albee** — pretty interesting and fairly modern stuff. We enjoyed that a lot and it was quite a good time in my life. Then in college I got involved in a very avant-garde theatre experience do you know the Living Theatre?

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Andy's inks over Greg LaRocque's pencils for POWER MAN & IRON FIST

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"One of my fondest memories was getting to personally yell at Mayor Beame."

DWIGHT: *I've heard of them, but beyond that, no.*

ANDY: Well, there were different groups. There was the Living Theatre, the Performance Group, the Open Theatre, and they all did unstructured anarchic kind of plays. The plays were not scripted. Often they were ad-libbed. They grew out of the experiences of members of the troupe, in many cases. The Drama department at Colgate University established that sort of thing when I was a student there. As a matter of fact, we had a student director who has since gone on to direct some Broadway plays and soap operas. His name is **Barnett Kellman**. I've lost touch with him over the years. He did KEY EXCHANGE among other things. *(The meal arrives.)*

DWIGHT: *Do you want to stop and eat?*

ANDY: No, we can go on.

DWIGHT: *Okay. What got you back into art?*

ANDY: Well, I had gone to Pratt University for one semester. I had thought of pursuing art when I graduated from high school. But somehow when at Pratt, I decided I wasn't getting enough out of the college experience. So I transferred to Colgate and got a B.A. degree in English literature there. I thought about teaching. Actually, I wound up in publishing for a while.

DWIGHT: *What kind of publishing?*

ANDY: It was a small company called Greystone Publishing. It did medical encyclopedias, garden encyclopedias and also repackaged British popular encyclopedias. It was a small enough place that you could roll up your sleeves and do a bunch of different things. I was officially the Assistant Managing Editor, but I also got to write copy, edit, proofread and do some artwork. That's how I started getting back to art.

DWIGHT: *How long were you with them?*

ANDY: Everything seems a blur back then . . a few years. There was a period of real political activism for me during the mid-'70s when I got involved in tenant rights. I worked with a local assemblyman for a year or two.

DWIGHT: *The landlords must have loved you.*

ANDY: Right, right. We organized rent strikes. We picketed City Hall. One of my fondest memories was getting to personally yell at **Mayor Beame** over a bad piece of legislature. *(Laughter.)* What happened as a result of this work was that I got involved with a tenant newspaper. And I became the paper's art director and illustrator. There I got to know some people who

The power of IRON FIST, as illustrated by Ernie Chan and Andy Mushynsky for #98.

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"Inking is a very low-overhead line of work."

were more into graphics. I started doing more and more illustrating and I wound up as art director for the New York Public Interest Research Group. It was a **Nader**-inspired good-government group that has offices and branches throughout New York state. We did a lot of work there. And it was with that job that I learned all the nuts-and-bolts stuff that I guess I should have learned at Pratt. It was a lot of fun working there. I did a lot of cartoon illustrations, paste-ups and design.

After I left them, I did some freelance commercial artwork for a while. I was sharing a studio with **Bob Smith**, the inker from DC. It was **Bob Smith**, **Carl Gafford** and myself in the studio. Carl was the invisible partner, we never saw him — he was working full time during the day and would come in at night after we had left.

I had always wanted to pencil for comics, but after talking to Bob and looking at the art he was inking, I decided that I didn't feel comfortable about pencilling. And, in talking with Bob, I got interested in trying this inking stuff. So I put some samples together and went over to DC with him. Bob took me in to see **Dick Giordano** and I was lucky enough to walk away with some small jobs for the mystery books. They were great proving grounds. It's a shame that they're gone now. I think my first story was a three-page thing. Then I got some seven- and eight-pagers. After working intermittently for DC for a year and a half, I moved over to Marvel and have been working there fairly steadily ever since.

DWIGHT: *One of the things I've noticed in your working methods is that you don't ink everything in the panel at once. You bounce all over the page, inking bits and pieces everywhere. Why is that?*

ANDY: That's an interesting question, because I understand that people like **John Severin** start at the upper left hand corner of the panel and work their way down the page. It's probably just a function of who I saw working that way. **Bob Smith** skips around. **Joe Rubenstein**, whom I've often watched, works that way, as well. Also, when you make a line with a pen, you have to wait for that line to dry, so you can't work on any one spot that long. As a result, you jump around a lot on the page.

DWIGHT: *Do you find youself working faster using this method?*

ANDY: Often. What I usually try to do is outline — or do as much penwork as I can, first. Then, I'll go back and do whatever is necessary in brush. Working with the pen goes very quickly. Lately, I've been moving more towards brushwork and trying to treat the brush as a pen, getting a light and heavy line just from the brush. With the craft of inking, you'll get very involved with a particular piece of equipment — a brush or a pen — and you discover that it can do such neat things.

Unused illustration for a fanzine article on ethnic stereotypes in comics. Art by Andy.

DWIGHT: *What materials do you use in your work?*

ANDY: The brush that I use is a Sable #3, currently the Kalinsky brand. I used to use the Windsor-Newtons but I've found that the quality in those has declined over the years.

DWIGHT: *When you say, "the quality has declined," what do you mean?*

ANDY: The brush doesn't hold its point as long as it should. It loses its bounce, its tip, more quickly. It just gets very limp and there isn't very much you can do with it except fill in the blacks. And that style and size of a brush can cost anywhere from $8 to $12 so you want to get one that will last for a while. I find that the Kalinskys hold their points better and are overall better brushes. I also enjoy the Artsign brush, which I think has pretty much disappeared. But brushes go through vogues. The Windsor-Newton is pretty much the standard, and a lot of people use it.

For a pen, I use a Hunt #102, basically

ANDY MUSHYNSKY

"Inking is the first thing I didn't

a stiff crowquill point which I hold onto for a long time until it gets semi-dull. I like working with it that way. I've experimented with more flexible points and I really like the line they give, but I don't feel comfortable enough with them to really use them. I can control a brush fairly well, so I use thin-and-thick techniques with a brush. The tools are actually very simple. I can carry all the tools of my trade in a small pouch. Inking is a very low-overhead line of work.

DWIGHT: *What's the fastest you've ever inked a page?*

ANDY: I don't keep track of it in those terms. Since I work on several pages at the same time, there are often several semi-finished pages floating around. They all get finished when they need to get finished. I think I had to do five pages in a very long day once. That, for me, was very difficult.

There's always something new and different to work on and consider. It's been a long continual process of learning the mechanics of the craft. I've done a lot of different things in my life and I think that inking is the first thing that I've encountered that I didn't think I could conquer in six months and know all its nuances. I still feel like a beginner and I feel like there are many more years left for me to learn a lot of things.

DWIGHT: *With G.I. JOE, you started out inking Frank Springer. What was it like to ink Frank?*

ANDY: Well, I've always like **Frank Springer**'s work. I've been aware of him for years, ever since he did PHOEBE ZEITGEIST. He was also an editorial cartoonist for THE NEW YORK DAILY NEWS for a year or two. He is a very design-conscious penciller. He's more interested in the overall effect on the page or panel than he is on the individual figure. I learned an awful lot from him. He has a very impressionistic approach to machinery — the stuff looks right, unless you study it.

DWIGHT: *Your job as an inker, to define what was pencilled, must have presented you with some real challenges, then.*

ANDY: There was that. But also my feeling was that I should keep as much flavor of the pencil artist's work as possible, so I didn't want to over-render anything of Frank's. It was an interesting challenge because I tend to do rather tight inking. And working over someone who was rather loose was a good growing experience.

DWIGHT: *Now Rod Whigham has come in, and his style is completely different from Frank's.*

ANDY: Right. *He's* a very tight penciller. Very interested in detail. I think we'll move the book in a very interesting direction now. G.I. JOE is about detail, is about hardware, and is about hundreds of characters. And Rod seems to very much enjoy pencilling that stuff. I really respect the amount of work he puts into G.I. JOE. I think his sense of design is not as polished as Frank's. But I enjoy working on his stuff a lot. And I think the fans are really going to like it. I think they'll respond well to the conscientious detailed work he does.

DWIGHT: *Besides G.I. JOE, you're also inking THE VISION AND SCARLET WITCH limited series, right?*

ANDY: This limited series has given me the opportunity to get back into the super-hero mainstream and get out of the, I guess we can call it, "the toy ghetto." The comics that are based on toys are often good sellers, but not exactly general fan favorites. As a result, the people who work on the toy tie-ins are often ignored.

DWIGHT: *Aren't you under more restrictions on the toy tie-in comics?*

ANDY: Oh, certainly, because we have to reproduce the look of the characters. And I understand that there are storyline restrictions on **Larry Hama**, the writer of G.I. JOE. But getting back to people working on the toy tie-in comics, I've been inking G.I. JOE for close to a year now and people in the office occasionally ask me what I am doing, and what I have been doing — and this is G.I. JOE, which is a very good seller! So it's nice to get back into the super-hero mainstream and get noticed again.

DWIGHT: *What differences have you noticed between the inking requirements for THE VISION AND SCARLET WITCH limited series and G.I. JOE?*

ANDY: I've discovered that because the super-hero characters are so much less detailed than the G.I. JOE characters — who have all these weapons, ammo belts and a multiplicity of details for each character — that the inking goes much more quickly. And the fact that the super-heroes have more open forms enables me to use more line-weight variations. My stuff is looking more like **Joe Sinnot**'s inking with its thicker and juicier lines. THE VISION AND SCARLET WITCH is turning out to be a lot more brushwork, which is fun. And when I get tired of the brush, I can go back and pick up my pen and do little G.I. JOE figures.

DWIGHT: *Now that you've been in comics*

think I could conquer in six months."

a while, Andy, what is your perception of the industry?

ANDY: There is a lot of potential in the field. For the first time a lot of different styles are acceptable. Ten years ago, **Bill Sienkiewicz** would never have been allowed to do the work he is doing now. His stuff is just too far away from the narrow mainstream definition of super-hero comic art. There are a lot of new creative packages that are being tried out — the graphic novels, the alternative publishers, and the limited series.

On a personal level, I feel frustrated that I'm not attempting more or doing more. I would like to move into taking on more work . . . eventually doing some pencilling. I feel I need to stretch more, artistically. That part is very important to me and, I think, to a lot of other people in the industry as well. The field seems to attract people who are very committed to their work. I remember reading an interview in a recent issue of COMICS INTERVIEW — with **Dan Jurgens**, I think it was. There was a caption or a call-out that said something like, "Sometimes it seems like there's no time for anything else." And that's true. Especially in the early learning stages. As I said before, I still consider myself to be very much a beginner.

This is a real exciting time to be in comics. There've been very impressive advances in the relationship between the creative people and the business people. The incentive payments have helped a lot. Comics is not an especially good-paying field in relation to a lot of other commercial art areas. I think it's a field that you're attracted to because you grew up with it and you love it. It's a field you want to experiment and learn in. Unless you are extremely prolific and/or multi-talented like **John Byrne**, for instance, I think you will only ever make a modest living. And you will have to work very hard for that modest living.

DWIGHT: *You mentioned in a conversation some time ago a book that's influenced you —*

ANDY: Yes, there's a book called DRAWING ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE BRAIN, which deals with learning how to draw. The right side of the brain is supposed to be the non-cognitive side, the intuitive part that thinks non-linearly. This book is supposed to exercise that part of the brain, to teach it to draw better. It's an interesting book. The author talks about the "high" that results from being very involved in your drawing. She likens it to the "runners' high" — the feeling runners get after running for a half-hour or an hour. And it's true with art — I gather that it's also true with writers, as well. Any creative work, in fact, you get so involved with your work that you lose your sense of self, time, and your surroundings. It is just you and what you are doing. And the work just flows out.

What I'm really curious about now is how to get to that point where creativity flows more freely. I find that I start out slowly and then the feeling gradually begins to happen. It's coming more easily now than it did at

Art from the VISION & SCARLET WITCH limited series by Richard Howell & Andy.

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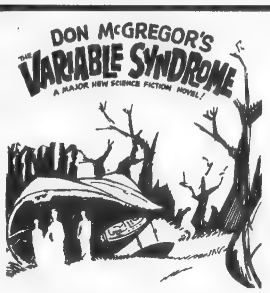

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the beginning, because I've been doing so much work on a regular basis. I get the sense that people like **John Byrne** or **Bill Sinkiewicz** are able to get to that spot almost immediately. They can produce, or let things flow, without any self-censorship or doubt or whatever it is that slows people down for a while. How do you turn it on and off like that?

DWIGHT: *If you can figure that out, and do your own book about it, you'll make a million!*

ANDY: Right! *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Earlier today, I saw you talking with a couple of people who wanted to be your assistant. Could you describe what they'd be doing?*

ANDY: They're background assistants.

DWIGHT: *What is a background assistant, exactly, and how does one work with an artist?*

ANDY: It varies from relationship to relationship. Some people have assistants outline any non-figures, just do any machinery. Some artists just have them do straight-line ruling. Others have them do organic stuff, like trees. Then the artist will come back and do the main rendering. I have not worked that extensively with background assistants to establish any sort of set relationship. With different people, I've done different things. I think it's been as much a learning process for me as it has for them. I think it can be a very valuable experience for them, I really hope to establish an on-going relationship with one. Unfortunately, what happens is that when the assistant gets very good, he goes on to get his own assignments.

DWIGHT: *Then you have to train someone else all over again?*

ANDY: Well, it's not so much training as it is learning to work with each other. I'm not so sure how much you can train anybody if he doesn't have the core talent to begin with. You can expose someone to the stuff. When the assistant goes into the office to drop off work, for instance, then he can first-hand see a lot of other work. And that experience — seeing as much original art in development as possible — can be very valuable. I'm trying to find someone I can work with on G.I. JOE, because I'm now also working on THE VISION AND SCARLET WITCH limited series.

DWIGHT: *Artists seem to have an advantage over writers when it comes to collaborating. From what I've seen, and experienced, writing is more of a solitary effort than drawing.*

ANDY: I've read of collaborations in writing, and I just don't know how it can be done! In science fiction, **Harlan Ellison** collaborated with a number of famous science-fiction writers on a bunch of short stories that were collected into a paperback. And Harlan went into detail about each collaboration in an essay at the start of each short story. It must be very difficult to do.

With inking, some people I've worked with have been pretty talented and I've learned from them. **Kyle Baker** is one of those. He's an amazingly talented young guy. His approach to doing backgrounds was so loose and fluid that *I* was learning from him. But even so, there were certain things he did with which I disagreed.

Andy inks Sal Buscema's art for INCREDIBLE HULK

Comics are such a team effort — it's a collaborative effort — and there are so many compromises that have to be made. Just the act of inking over someone else's work is still a strange experience for me. And it takes time to get used to the nuances of a new penciller. So even working with a new background artist that I really like, there's always something I'd want to change. My version might not be any better than his, but it's mine, and I feel more comfortable with it.

DWIGHT: *Another advantage that artists have over writers is that they can do a lot of swipes — either with stock poses that they repeat, or lifting a shape or position from*

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"Comics are such a team effort — there are so many compromises to be made."

a photograph or illustration. This isn't necessarily bad, but it sure gives an artist an edge for getting the job done faster that a writer doesn't have.

ANDY: It seems, however, that a writer can borrow concepts from other stories. For instance, with MOBY DICK, how could a writer express the themes from the novel in comic-book format? That is swiping, in a sense. Or a writer can take a character from **Hemingway**, as another example, and place that character in a comic-book setting. Granted, a writer can't swipe paragraphs. And I don't think that an artist should swipe wholesale I think he should look at other stuff as reference, and base his illustration on it, not outright copy it.

The other thing about taking this short cut is that sometimes you have to. Because of deadlines and the high pressure that exists in comics, people sometimes find themselves having to resort to such methods. I recall seeing a certain shot of a horse, over the years, that I have seen at least three or four different times, in different places, done by different people. I don't know who originated the pose.

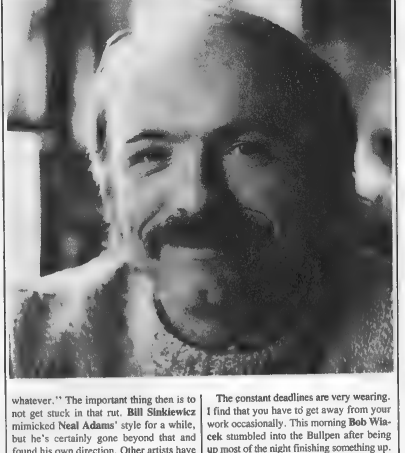
I was talking with **Jack Abel** and some of the other guys not too long ago. Jack had one of his old war comics stories swiped by **Roy Lichtenstein**, the pop artist who blew up comic-book panels and presented them as pop art in galleries. One of those panels was from one of Jack's stories that had to do with submarines. I asked Jack how he felt about Roy swiping one of his panels and making thousands of dollars off it and Jack not getting any credit at all. Jack was really philosophical about it. He said, "I probably swiped it from **Russ Heath**!" *(Laughter.)* So it goes. We were wondering where did the original art come from that everybody has since swiped from?

DWIGHT: *Where, indeed?*

ANDY: We figured it was **Murray the Caveman**. Murray was the original artist and everybody has been secretly going back into his cave and swiping from him ever since. I think swiping or latching onto somebody else's style and really staying with it very closely is actually a very valuable learning tool.

DWIGHT: *But that is different. In that case, the artist is using it as a stepping stone, learning how things are put together.*

ANDY: Right. You're learning a whole repertoire of techniques, which is very important. The rendering of different surfaces and textures. A good way to do it is to start out saying, "I'm going to be **Al Williamson**, **Wally Wood**, **John Byrne**, or whatever." The important thing then is to not get stuck in that rut. **Bill Sinkiewicz** mimicked **Neal Adams**' style for a while, but he's certainly gone beyond that and found his own direction. Other artists have never gotten beyond their mentor. Years ago, the big influences were **Wally Wood** and **Jack Kirby**. There were a lot of **Wally Wood** and **Jack Kirby** clones in the industry. Those people have either grown out of that period, or they've disappeared from the industry, because they couldn't grow and develop their own style.



DWIGHT: *What's the biggest challenge you've experienced so far as an inker?*

ANDY: Aside from meeting deadlines? *(Laughter.)* I think it's probably the discipline of just being able to do the work every day regardless of how you feel. When you're a beginner and working on practice pages, you can work on them when you feel like it, when you're fresh. But when you are faced with a monthly deadline, you don't have that option. You have to produce something. As **Bob Smith** told me once, "As long as you keep making marks on paper, the job will get done." Even if you're half asleep, you can rule lines or fill in the black areas. You just have to keep going.

The constant deadlines are very wearing. I find that you have to get away from your work occasionally. This morning **Bob Wiacek** stumbled into the Bullpen after being up most of the night finishing something up. Somebody offered him a seat and he said, "No, I've been sitting for too long. I just want to stand." There's always somebody going down to the wire on something. **Bob Budiansky** and **Janet Jackson**, a very fine designer who works here in the Bullpen, were up all night working on some coloring for THE SECTAURS. It's a very demanding field. It's fun on one level to be constantly pushed to the edge like that and find out what your limits are. But after a while it can get very tiring.

I think it's a function of deadline industries in general. I did a little bit of comic-strip work and the impression I got is that it's the same thing there. Some people are always down to the wire. I did a little bit of work on THE PHANTOM for **Sy Barry** when he wanted to go on vacation — the first vacation in years for him. I did a couple of weeks' worth of strips. This man had been working under the syndicate's deadline for close to twenty-five years! Just the thought of that is mind-boggling.

"I wanted to be a hermit and live in a

TOM YEATES

After a lackadaisical afternoon at the San Francisco Creation comics convention, Tom Yeates enthusiastically set out to interview Ken Macklin and Al Gordon. Al and Ken agreed... as long as they could ask all the questions. (That Tom, he's so clever, we still don't know how he turned this into the Tom Yeates interview.)

To those unfamiliar with Tom Yeates, his claim to fame becomes apparent in the pages that follow. We won't discuss that yet, we'll focus on the important stuff for now.

The "Winking Izardry"... er... inking wizardry of Al Gordon has embellished many a comics page for Marvel, DC and Eclipse. His recent credits include the DNAGENTS, TEEN TITANS, ROCKET RACCOON and THE ETERNALS. Al is currently working on the FANTASTIC FOUR. (He also plays guitar.)

Ken Macklin's niche in the art world is unique. (No one else would come near it.) Al describes Ken as a fine art cartoonist. His prints, paintings and illustrations are best known in science-fiction and fantasy fandom. His best known works in comics are the Dr. Watchstop stories in EPIC ILLUSTRATED. Ken's work will appear in ALIEN ENCOUNTERS #1 coming from Eclipse this summer.

The interview that follows was conducted in a highly extemporaneous manner at the home of Al Gordon...

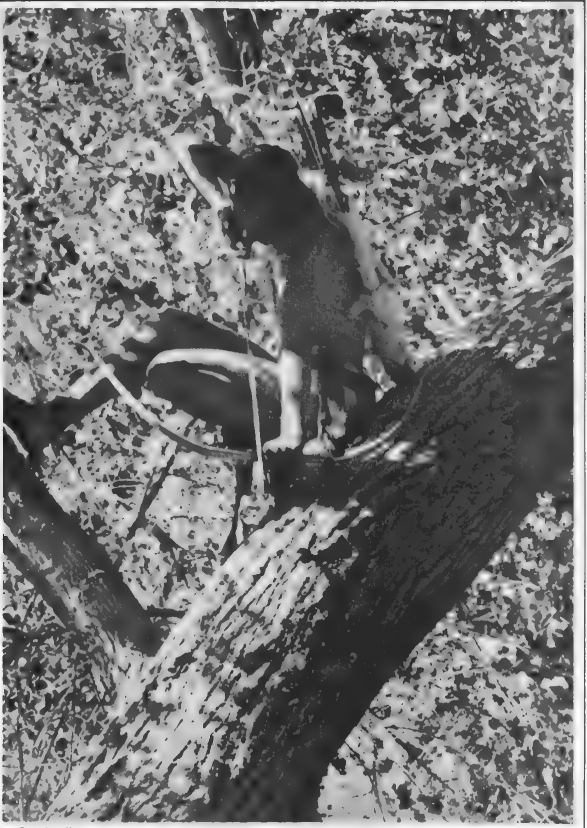
AL GORDON: *We had a list of the important questions, like "If you are in a bar, what do you tell women you do for a living?"*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Thomas Yeates (first e silent, rhymes with apes)
Born: 19 January 1955 — Sacramento, CA
Residence: California's north coast
Occupation: Illustrator
Credits: Various stories at DC including "Dragonsword" in WARLORD and, of course, SWAMP THING; HEAVY METAL; various stories for Pacific Comics; illustrated the novel PHOENIX PRIME by Ted White; CONAN, the newspaper strip; and TIMESPIRITS for Epic Comics.
Passtime: Not watching television
Favorite Comics: Of all time — PRINCE VALIANT. The first issues of CREEPY and EERIE. Currently — SWAMP THING, GRIMJACK, GROO.
Favorite Movies: KING KONG, TARZAN AND HIS MATE, ROBIN HOOD, THE MISFITS.

TOM YEATES: I dunno.
KEN MACKLIN: *Do you have any soapboxes that you'd like the chance to get on?*
TOM: I enjoy old fashioned stuff, and I'm trying to come up with a new take on it that'll be amusing. Why is it that I get a great deal more pleasure out of looking at a **Roy Krenkel** doodle than reading a **Frank Miller** comic book? It's what I dig. *(Laughter.)* It's got more enjoyment to me.
KEN: *Soul.*
TOM: Soul. It's got more soul. Not that **Frank Miller** doesn't have soul...
AL: *Are you warming up?*
TOM: ...but maybe the soul that he has I don't like that much.
KEN: *Really?*
TOM: I get a really negative feeling from it, whereas from Roy's stuff I get a really up, enjoyment-of-life, going-for-it...
AL: *Do you think that Frank's stuff has negative connotations, kind of a cynical look?*
TOM: To be honest, I haven't read that much of Frank's stuff, but I've read some of it. I think **Frank Miller**'s really good. He does what he does probably better than I do what I do. He's a great comic-book artist, but I don't get that great of a vibe from it.
AL: *What does that mean — he does what he does better than you do what you do?*
TOM: He does his heavy, violent delivery thing better than I do my illustrative thing.

cave with a whole bunch of animals."



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"My heroes are Robin Hood and Tarzan."

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Though it's hard for me to look at myself objectively.

AL: *Okay, where do you see Frank coming from as opposed to where you're coming from?*

TOM: Looking at him, I'd say his influence is probably **Sam Peckinpah** or **Roman Polanski** or something, and for me I'm into ROBIN HOOD and KING KONG, that's all. Not that one's better than the other. Maybe he's hitting at the heart of the visceral feeling that's inside this turbulent America we live in or something, but I'd rather do other things.

AL: *Let's get back to the important things.*

TOM: (*Laughter.*) That kind of fizzled out.

AL: *I think the important thing is what do you tell women when you meet them in a bar?*

TOM: I tell them I'm a Mercedes-Benz salesman.

KEN: *How do you describe what you do for a living?*

TOM: I usually say that I draw pictures for a living.

AL: *I usually go a little farther and say I'm a graphic illustrator, and they'll say, "Oh really?" I usually start laughing at that point.*

TOM: Right. I'll say I'm an illustrator. It's kind of a different word. My grandfather finally latched on to that as what his grandson does. "He's an Il-lus-strat-or." He liked the sound of that, rolled it around. "Il-lus-strat-or." Sounded good. I never think of myself as an artist. That's too big of a responsibility. I've done some stuff that I would consider art, and there is some art in what I do, but I would think overall that mostly it's just drawing pictures. Drawing a picture is a technical thing. It's a craft that you learn how to do, and it's not necessarily art with a capital A.

AL: *So what is art with a capital A?*

TOM: That's pretty nebulous. The way that I deal with it is by not dealing with it. I just say, "Okay, you guys who want to be fine artists and do real art like draping curtains across hillsides, and all that weird stuff that goes up in the middle of malls . . ."

AL: *Some of that is not art, it's just conceptual bullshit.*

TOM: That's how you deal with that stuff. Me, I can see that they're doing something interesting. They're expressing something that's deep down inside of them and they're getting it all out. It's like **Jackson Pollack**. I think it's great. I saw this killer film of **Jackson Pollack** when I was in high school. His canvas was a clear plastic thing and the camera was underneath it. He was looking down at it, dipping his brush into buckets of house paint and splattering it right at the camera, in essence, because the camera was underneath. It was this big sidewalk-sized thing, and he was walking around it in these boots and overalls with paint all over him, taking curled up pieces of paper and throwing them so that they'd stick to it in funny ways and he'd scratch his chin and walk around to the other side and splatter on it for a while. He went through about three canvases that way.

Sample done for adaptation of the GREYSTOKE film.

AL: *That sounds like fun.*

TOM: It was great! I think that's cool. I'm not going to say that that's bullshit art. What I mean by Art with a capital A is fine art, what is accepted in the art critic's world.

KEN: *I get the impression that you like art that carries a little bit of a story to it rather than just art for its formal qualities.*

TOM: I've always been drawn toward and I've always tried to draw a picture that has a story going on in it. Now, even though I started off this conversation by saying that **Frank Miller** is better at being a cinematographer and really telling the story as a graphic story first, while I like to draw pictures, let me just say I like to draw pictures that have a story in them. The **Hal Foster** approach. He can draw one picture that tells you a hell of a lot. You know who a character is, where he's coming from, what's going on in the little shack he just came out of, that he bought goods from the merchant because they're laid out there and he paid him so many coins because there

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"Norman Rockwell just blows my mind."

they are and he wishes he could get away with paying less because he's trying to slip the other ones out of the guy's pocket, and on and on and on. Just one drawing that's got all this to it. It's a story. It's lowbrow, but I dig it.

AL: *Why is it lowbrow?*

KEN: *Well, the definition of highbrow is classical, abstract, qualities of art and culture that are basically devoid of base emotions, human emotions. It's the difference between contemplating a color for what it is versus a color for what it means. I can get off on a picture because it has nice textures and harmonies and things like that, but what does that mean to anybody emotionally?*

TOM: Right. You can do something with nice texture and color harmonies that is nice because of that, but if you do it in a picture that has something interesting going on, my dad, who is kind of a cowboy at heart — or somebody who isn't into art for art's sake — can look at it and go, "Hey! That's neat! This guy is sneaking that out from under the table while he points at . . ." whatever it is in the story they can look at and see something. Like **Norman Rockwell**, that picture tells a story **Norman Rockwell** is put down a lot as too . . .

AL: *Cutesy.*

TOM: Whatever it is they put him down for, I can never put **Norman Rockwell** down. His stuff just blows my mind. That's why I don't call myself an artist. I just draw pictures.

KEN: *I wonder if Rockwell did the same thing?*

TOM: Although every once in a while art, that is just a really neat composition and is bold and stands on its own, doesn't have to tell a story. But doing the picture that *does* tell a story is like an excuse for doing art.

AL: *Art is communication in a certain way, whether it's communication with yourself or communication with someone else. Don't you ever feel great about your own stuff sometimes? Just look at it and go, "Hey, that's great! That's what I wanted to do!"*

TOM: Um hum. But I guess I'm just not confident enough of myself to think that it's that valid. This is what I'm wanting to do, but has what I'm offering got any meat to it?

KEN: *Do you have any desire to totally write and illustrate your own stories rather than work as part of a creative team?*

TOM: Oh, yeah. I'd love to do my own schtick. I don't know if I'd be able to pull it off, but at this point, after drawing comic books for six years that other people wrote, I've definitely got a lot of itching to write my own stuff.

KEN: *Do you have notebooks of ideas or concepts that you've been holding in the back of your head for years?*

TOM: A few. Sometimes I'll write down neat little things, and go back to them after a while and go, gee, that was weird, probably useless.

AL: *How futile.*

TOM: Yeah, But I do have have some very complete stories waiting in the back of my mind: "Future Blues," Thunder Island," "Tarzan in America."

KEN: *One time last year, we were all out to dinner and went around the table, people naming their three favorite comics. About two out of three, consistently, were comics that were totally created by one person, books by writer/artists.*

TOM: Like AMERICAN FLAGG and THOR . . .

AL: *What about SWAMP THING?*

KEN: *SWAMP THING's a good team. There are books that are great team books, and there are books like THOR that are totally the product of one person that are also really . . .*

TOM: My favorite work in the field, or the guys that I think are the best are, say — starting back a long time ago — **Winsor McCay, Milton Caniff, Hal Foster, Alex Toth,** then **Richard Corben.** The guys that are just real milestone mindblower stuff. **Moebius** at his peak. That stuff is just great, especially the sequences that don't have any words —

KEN: *Totally cinematic*

TOM: Right. Where you're just riding along in the jeep with them. I like things that take you for a ride, where you just put on your seat belt and hold on tight, and away you go

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"It was hard doing SWAMP THING. I

AL: *Some teams seem like everything they do is a compromise. Nobody's really speaking their mind. Then you've got teams that seem to expand with each other. With SWAMP THING, it's a synergy, the sum of the parts is bigger.*

TOM: I think the idea of the sum being more than the parts is great, and I would like to work with a writer that I was *really* comfortable with. I don't really feel that with **Marty Pasko** or **Steve Perry** — whom I've done the most amount of work with — that they utilized my ideas the way I'd like to see them utilized. They turned them around and in the case of **Steve Perry**, he does what he *thinks* I want to do. In the case of **Marty Pasko**, I'd tell him what I'd want, and he'd say, "Gee, that's an idea," and then he'd give me a story back that twisted it all around so that it was saying something completely different even though it had some of the same imagery, so I got to draw what I liked even if I didn't like what he was saying.

AL: *Are you saying that you don't like to work with other people?*

TOM: Well, maybe I'm just at that stage y'know?

AL: *So when are you gonna do your own book?*

TOM: I dunno. I've been doing a little bit of writing in TIMESPIRITS. I go along dealing with the here-and-now, flying by the seat of my pants and making the most of that.

KEN: *How does your approach to working a creator-owned book differ from a company owned one?*

AL: *You don't get any free comics.*

KEN: *They don't pay for your phone bill.*

TOM: Right. Marvel Comics cuts off all the fringe benefits on a creator-owned book. I don't know if DC or the others do. Maybe working for a smaller independent company there wouldn't be any of those fringe benefits anyway. Most of *them* let you own your own characters. It's nice to know, though that if something ever does come of it that you'll be the first in line. With the other way, you're not even in line. You're outside in the street. I don't have a hell of a lot of faith in something I do turning into a movie or a big mega-buck concept like SUPERMAN, so I don't think that I'm going to wind up that much better off, but I like the insurance that if something should come up, I'm covered.

AL: *I wonder with something like AMERICAN FLAGG, if Howard decides he doesn't want to do it any more, if First has the option to keep it going, get somebody else?*

KEN: *Or if Chaykin could just unilaterally kill the strip?*

TOM: There was a point in TIMESPIRITS when I was really angry and I wanted to quit. I was going to finish #4 and that would be it. This was going to be a retroactive mini-series ending with #4. Then I realized that Marvel had paid for the scripts for #5 and #6 and they had them and I was suddenly very much afraid that they would hire someone else to draw them. If I had known that the series could have ended at that point, I might have quit and that would have been it, because of what I was so ticked off about at that time. The separators said that I didn't know anything about comics, and they refused to separate my work. So I had to pay the colorist a higher rate, to go full color.

AL: *Too many separations?*

TOM: It was just too tedious to go in on work like mine and color all the different little things different colors.

KEN: *Can we talk about what you tell women in bars you do for a living?*

TOM: Yeah, I tell them I sell Jaguars. Um, sometimes I'm introduced as "This is Tom! He draws comic books!" And it really bugs me.

AL: *It's always nice to be introduced as "This is Tom, he's good in bed." Who are your heroes in comics, writ ing and art?*

TOM: My heroes. Well, I dunno. I think heroes are a great thing, but my heroes are more Robin Hood and Tarzan, stuff like that.

AL: *They didn't draw comics.*

TOM: In comics, I'd say it's more who I admire. Making a hero out of somebody is weird.

AL: *Okay, scratch that. Who do you admire in comics?*

TOM: Well, I like **Al Williamson**. That's a guy who's a big influence on me.

AL: *I heard you worked with him.*

Tom sold "The Stones Play Philly" to Marvel in '79. The 8-page story has yet to see print.

TOM: *(Laughter.)* Where did you hear that?

AL: *From you.*

TOM: Yeah. Well, that was a fun story.

AL: *Would you tell us?*

KEN: *Back to you, Kitty Carlisle.*

TOM: Good old Al. It's kind of hard to think of Al as a hero because when you know him he's just one of the gang. He's one of the few people I know that stares at women's legs as often as **Al Gordon** does. *(Laughter.)* Kind of takes him off the

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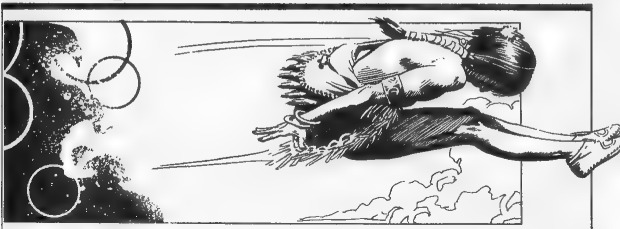
didn't agree with the morals of the stories."



1985 Steve Perry & Tom Yeates

Above and below: Art from Tom's TIMESPIRITS Epic Comics series for Marvel.

pedestal and back into the rumble seat with the rest of us.

KEN: *He's a normal guy, but he can draw.*

TOM: He's alot of fun to work with once you get going with him. I had a hard time at first.

AL: *Well, how about telling us how you got started in comics? Did you always want to draw comics?*

TOM: No. When I was a kid, what I really wanted to do when I grew up was to be a hermit and live in a cave in the mountains with a whole bunch of animals who were my buddies and not deal with people.

KEN: *Another introvert who found a way to communicate through his pencils.*

AL: *A lot of us started that way. When did comics come into your life?*

TOM: The comic books I saw were just the comic books that passed by me. I liked ZORRO... had a lot of those, it seemed like . . . a couple of DAVY CROCKETTs, maybe a couple of DISNEYs. I had a real **Disney**-oriented youth.

AL: *Are you singing the theme to DAVIE CROCKETT?*

TOM: Fess Parker was a big influence on me as a child. Good old Fess.

AL: *What kind of a name is Fess?*

TOM: I wonder if it's short for Fester? Or festering?

Anyway, I was drawing all the time, THEY WERE THERE AT THE BATTLE OF THE ALAMO, THE STORY OF GEORGE WASHINGTON. I must've done 40 or 50 drawings of the Alamo scene in grammar school. I drew rockets and airplane things. Mostly I drew people. Usually cowboys and Indians, that type of stuff. I was also influenced a lot by TV that I saw. I seem to remember that one of the first monsters I drew was a version of the giant gila monster. You remember that? It was a pretty neat movie. This guy kills it in the end by driving his prize hot rod, loaded with TNT, into the thing. There was this great image of the gila monster sticking its nose through a barn wall while there's a teen-age dance going on inside.

AL: *That happened to me in high school. (Laughter.)*

TOM: He stole your girl, right?

AL: *Yeah.*

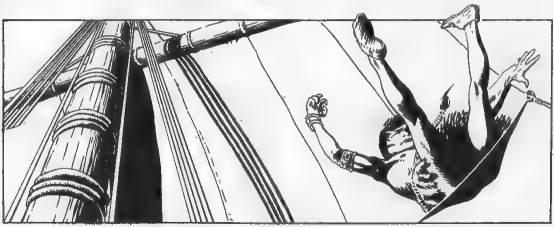
TOM: Well, that was a big influence on me. I did lots of drawings of Tarzan when I was little. I also remember that one of the first drawings I did was Peter Pan.

AL: *What was your first professional job — the first thing that was printed?*

TOM: I had two things come out pretty much simultaneously. One was a **Tarzan** drawing printed in THE JASOOMIAN, a **Burroughs** fanzine published by a notorious character named **Bill Dutcher** who there's all kinds of strange stories about. He lived in Yuba City, which is like 30 miles north of Sacramento where I grew up. Right about the same time, I sent some stuff to **Adam Malin**, and he published a drawing of **Bob Dylan** in INFINITY #4,

When I got out of high school, I went to New York. Adam had published, at that time, INFINITY #9, which had two of my illustrations in it. So far they'd all been rock and roll drawings. Just copies of photographs.

AL: *Jimi Hendrix?*



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"I chased a lot of girls, got 'em in trouble."

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TOM: Jimi Hendrix, Ian Anderson and **Bob Dylan.**

KEN: *I'm sure I've seen those...*

TOM: ...those are slick 'zines, they had a lot of nice stuff in them, by a lot of real pro guys. **Corben, Wrightson,** etc. Well, I went up to New York, to **Phil Seuling**'s convention in '73 , and I talked to **Sol Harrison** of DC, and he was real cranky and it was late and hot. New York in July and all that. He looked at my stuff and kind of tore it apart because he said the drawings were good but I could've taken a year on each one. He couldn't tell if I could really draw comics. He said I might one day if I really worked at it, but I wasn't their type of material now. So I decided to give in to my parents and go to college — Utah State University. I hung out with people who were there for the same reason: low tuition, easy to get into and great skiing. Chased a lot of Mormon girls, got 'em in trouble.

AL: *They run fast.*

TOM: They didn't run *that* fast.

AL: *I married one. I caught her... At what point did you decide that you wanted to do comics?*

TOM: Well, I actually went to an underground comics convention in Berkeley and talked to **Bud Plant** and **Jack Jackson** and **Jack Katz. Katz** told me what kind of pen I had to use. "You have to use a hawk quill pen. This is the pen." He drew a little picture and wrote it down, and that was his critique of my art. *(Laughter.)* My breakdowns were okay, but I couldn't really draw the whole thing so that it was consistently right. I learned the old-fashioned, all-American technique of do a long shot, do a close-up, do a high-angle shot, do an up shot, and you've got a layout. My cousin told me that when I first went and visited him.

AL: *McDonald's fast-food-type drawing.*

TOM: Exactly. The old formula. I went to a couple of cons. One of them was an underground comics convention, the other one was called Baycon. It was at the Claremont.

KEN: *Yeah, 1975. I was there.*

TOM: Did you go up and meet **Joe Kubert**?

KEN: *I did not go up and meet Joe Kubert. I talked to Starlin and Brunner and Al Weiss. So anyway, Tom, you talked to Joe Kubert at this convention?*

TOM: Well, somehow I met **Frank Cirocco**. He told me that **Kubert** would be up at their room sometime that night. So I hung around and I went up to that room and **Kubert** showed up about midnight and I had to drive back to Sacramento, but I talked to him. He was a guy I was interested in because he was doing the **Burroughs** stuff then at DC, and he was doing a really good job at it. It was neat stuff. Anyway, he liked my work and he thought that he would be able to print some of my drawings in the back of some of his **Burroughs** titles, like he was doing with another artist named **Neal MacDonald, Jr.**, who did "Beast of Amtor" and these other odds and ends. I started corresponding with Joe after that. When he started up his school, he wrote and told me about it and I talked my parents into it and went. The first year of the school was '76 -- the fall of '76. At that point it was a two-year school. It was in this old mansion in Dover, New Jersey. There were about twenty or thirty of us in the first class.

AL: *Who was in the first class with you?*

TOM: There were a lot of local kids — they weren't very serious, but they were nice kids and they gave it a shot, listened to all the classes.

AL: *Who graduated from the school with you, then?*

TOM: Elaine Heinl, Ron Zalme, Ken-Feduniewicz, Rick Veitch... well, some didn't technically graduate. Rick works for **Archie Goodwin** most of the time, does EPIC stuff. But he'd already done...

KEN: *He did a lot of underground stuff, didn't he?*

TOM: He'd already done TWO-FISTED ZOMBIES with his brother, **Tom Veitch**, who did a lot of underground writing, sp-

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SALADIN HAS SPOKEN!
CLANG
ON THIS DAY IN THE YEAR 1191, A HUSH FALLS OVER THE BATTLEFIELD BEYOND JERUSALEM AS TWO KNIGHTS CHARGE WITH LETHAL FURY...
NO! OUR CHAMPION IS DOOMED--!
FEAR NOT, CHRISTIANS! CHEER NOT, PAGANS! BEHOLD!
H--HE IS GOING TO JOIN BATTLE AGAIN--
AYE-- IF HE DOES NOT BLEED TO DEATH FIRST!

The page that launched a career: then-editor Ross Andru spotted a copy of this Yeates page and immediately assigned him three back-up series.

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"Bissette was a big influence on Kubert."

ecifically for **Ron Turner** and **Greg Irons. Steve Bissette** was in the class. He was the guy we all pulled our hair out over because he would just do these lackadaisical, sloppy, wild, easy stuff that just solved all the problems and was great. We'd all sit around constipated trying to put something down, not doing that good of a job. He'd just barrel through all the assignments, and he was really fast, which now no one will believe because he takes so long to do SWAMP THING. Gets way behind schedule. He would just sit down and bash his assignments out. I learned something from **Bissette** at that point that was real helpful, which was how to twist an assignment around so that it was something that you would enjoy drawing. Many of us, especially when we first get started, have a real mental block about drawing something that someone else describes for you. I've never had any problem sitting down and drawing out of my head, I've got tons of images that just come out. But when somebody tells you what to draw, that's something else entirely.

AL: *You start sweating over whether you're going to be living up to their conceptualization.*

TOM: Yeah. Not only that, but just being able to do a half-assed decent drawing of what's required. Just to do that. **Ric Estrada**, who was a wonderful teacher we had there, gave us an assignment called "The Champion," about a horse race and the horse that performs the best, and there's all these stunts it's gotta go through. **Bissette**, refusing to draw horses because horses are hard to draw, did the whole thing as a race between insects, because he has this real thing about insects. He's really good at drawing bugs. The bugs were having this race, going through all these trials and everything, and the bug that won was the champion. In a way, **Ric Estrada** was really teed off at him for not doing what he was told, but he did do the story, he made the point of the story, and it looked great, it worked, and **Steve Bissette** was always doing that in his assignments. Slowly I started to grasp that and incorporate it into my own stuff, that ability to twist a comic-book story around so that it's something you like.

KEN: *Did you sell anything before you graduated from the school?*

TOM: Yeah. As soon as Joe thought any of us were able to do something, he'd bring in back-ups from SGT. ROCK. **Veitch** and **Bissette** did the first job that we got, called "Saigon Sally," which you still see letters about in ROCK, "Who drew 'Saigon Sally'?" They come up with this amazing list of possibilities. "Was it **Gray Morrow**?" and so on.

AL: *Steve Ditko?*

TOM: Yeah. It was really strange stuff, 'cause Joe wouldn't let us sign any of those first jobs that we did. He claimed that we'd thank him later.

AL: *What a shrewd man.*

TOM: I got one of the early scripts, at the end of the first year. I did it in the springtime of '77. That was "The Preacher" which was in SGT. ROCK #312. It was my first comic-book job. **Bill Kelley** wrote it. Bill was friends with **Kubert** and used to show movies in the basement at school. He was really into Hammer films. He interviewed **Bruce Dern** for Joe's SOJOURN, which he was working on at the time. I might also say that I think that **Bissette** was a real big influence on **Kubert**. I saw an awful lot of **Bissette** drawing coming out of **Kubert**'s hand when we were working at the school.

AL: *Really?*

TOM: Oh, yeah. Especially like the cover of SOJOURN #2, which is this kind of slimy monster sitting there on his haunches licking his fingers while some other slimy monster's devouring a spaceman in the background with a girl hiding behind a rock. Maybe I just didn't realize that Joe had all that stuff in him, but I saw **Bissette** doing that and I saw Joe just loving **Bissette**'s stuff . . . they would have a blast drawing together, and **Veitch**, too — they were like this mad team and they would stay up all night doing these weird assignments. It was fun. Did a couple of other back-up features, I think UNEXPECTED was one . . . one in GHOSTS. The **Kubert** school *was* interesting. At that point, when it was a two-year school, when we first went there, we were taught by teachers who hadn't done much

Preliminary study for cover of AZTEC ACE #11.

Aztec Ace 1980 Doug Moench

"I quit SWAMP THING . . . I'd really like

STAR WARS
WILLIAMSON drawn by AL WILLIAMSON
STAR WARS SCRAPBOOK
DEWBACK LIZARD OF TATOOINE
Shaken by the sudden specter of Darth Vader. Luke, get hold o' his own!
YOUR ILLUSIONS ARE DISHEARTENING, STILL! BUT THE ONLY WAY THEY CAN DO REAL HARM...
SO IF I GIVE IN TO THEM?
A MIND WITCH HAS MANY POWERS! IF IMAGES TORN FROM YOUR MEMORY ARE NO LONGER EFFECTIVE
I CAN WIELD PHYSICAL OBJECTS! I HATE TO CRUSH A SOURCE OF MENTAL ENERGIES WHICH CAN FEED AND RENEW ME...
BUT YOUR FRIENDS SHOULD HAVE WE SOON TO REPLACE YOU!
AND...
GREAT IDEA, SWINGIN'! ACROSS THE RIVER ON A VINE! CHEWIE! TOO BAD IT BROKE!
AT LEAST IT GOT US BEYOND THE WORST CURRENTS. AN CLOSER TO SAVIN' LUKE!

STAR WARS Sunday page by Tom Yeates and Al Williamson. Opposite: Detail from cover for SWAMP THING #23 (second series).

teaching before, but they were incredibly talented men.

AL: *Like who?*

TOM: Lee Elias, Kubert, Estrada and **Giordano**. They would all give you a lot of assignments, they were real, real demanding. Of course, comics are a high-powered industry and you've got to be able to pump out a lot of stuff to make a decent living and these guys have been pumping out pages all their lives, so they expected us to do the same. But it was pretty difficult to a decent job on the assignments.

AL: *Well, how did you end up doing the SWAMP THING and then TIMESPIRITS?*

KEN: *There's a few more years . . .*

TOM: A few more years in there, right. Once thing that was nice, though, when I got out of the school, was that I was able to move in with **Bissette, Veitch** and **John Totleben**. **Totleben** was in the second year with **Ron Randall, Jan Duursema, Dave Dorman, Tom Mandrake, Kim DeMulder, Craig Boldman** and a lot of others. Second year was a larger class. Somewhere along the line I managed to sell some work to DC. When **Bissette**, who was kinda star of the class, went to DC, he got really put down and kinda tossed out by **Vinnie Colletta**, who was the art director at DC. He told Steve he didn't know anything about drawing comics. Anyway, most of us didn't bother with DC then. They seemed to have a grudge against **Kubert** students, like Joe had the audacity to think his students could get a job up there, "Well, we'll show him, we won't give any of them jobs." So we went up to Marvel, and **Rick Marschall** was the editor we wound up talking to, and being slightly crazed, he gave us all work and paid us great amounts of money for these real bizarre things. I personally couldn't believe he was an editor up there, and wasn't the least bit surprised that the guy got fired.

AL: *Oh, well.*

TOM: He was a real godsend to us. Got us through that first summer. When I was going in and out of New York, going up to Marvel, I kept bumping into **Jack Harris** on the bus. **Jack Harris'** wife Kelley taught paste-up and mechanicals at the **Kubert** school, so I sort of knew him. He kept saying, "Hey, why don't you bring your portfolio to DC?" He is a nice guy, real friendly. Although he might be manipulated and the victim of company back-stabbing, he really didn't participate in any of it. At least, not to me. So I went up there, and he gave me a script and it was in GHOSTS #89, "The Phantom's Last Act." It was a pretty bad script, so it needed a good cast. I cast **Boris Karloff** and **Peter Lorre** in the starring roles. Right about that time, **Williamson** was going to quit his SECRET AGENT CORRIGAN strip, which he'd been doing for about fifteen years, and do an adaptation of THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK to get back into comic books. He talked with **Kubert** and asked if he had any students he could recommend as an assistant to help come up and give him a shot in the arm, a little young blood in the studio there. Joe mentioned this to me. I gave Al a call and we hit it off right away because we were both into **Edgar Rice Burroughs** and **Errol Flynn** movies and all that crap, y'know. I went up there and helped Al finish SECRET AGENT X-9 while he got into THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK. Although we became really good friends, I wasn't able to *finesse* as far as doing artwork with him, at first. I brought **Veitch** up and they hit it off really well. Anyway, I did "Pigs on the Wing" for HEAVY METAL, but they didn't pay me for another two years until they published it, which was kind of hard on my ability to pay the rent, but the gang always helped each other in that department. Some time around '79 I went back to DC, but the rope was getting tighter around **Jack Harris'** neck up there; for some reason they were just strangling him. I showed my stuff to **Len Wein**, and he loved it. He was real-

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someone else to take over TIMESPIRITS."

ly helpful at getting my stuff in, even if they only had two pagers. I started working for TIME WARP, HOUSE OF MYSTERY and MYSTERY IN SPACE. I got to do a couple of really nice science-fiction strips. One was by **Gerry Conway** called "The Killing Time." It was a pretty neat story. Three **Bruce Jones** stories. Two of them, in fact, were some of the best stories I think he'd ever written. Those were in MYSTERY IN SPACE and I think one was in HOUSE OF MYSTERY. And about that time, there was talk going around DC about SWAMP THING and Len kept telling me that if I'd agree to draw it he'd start SWAMP THING up again. I didn't really want to draw a series. I always liked just drawing one-shot stories for science-fiction books and mystery books. That's the type of comics I liked to read, and that's what I wanted to do — more freedom. But anyway I got a call and he said, "Okay, the first issue's scripted, come in and pick it up, we need the book in three weeks," and I was just there in the middle of it. I got carried along in the current. I'm drawing the SWAMP THING monthly comic book, and the movie's coming out and everybody's really excited about it and the guy who's making the movie, **Michael Uslan**, is also going to make a BATMAN movie that's really going to set the world on end.

AL: *Did they do the comic because the movie was coming out?*

TOM: I think that was the impetus. I did SAGA OF THE SWAMP THING for a year, twelve issues.

KEN: *So there it was, you were established, you were doing comics.*

TOM: Yeah.

KEN: *Your dream had come true! You had a book, fans, conventions.*

TOM: Right, right. Well, it was kinda funny. It was hard doing SWAMP THING because I was pencilling and inking it myself and it was so much work. Adapting **Marty Pasko**'s scripts was without question the hardest thing I've ever done. For some reason, the way he described things was just incredibly taxing to make a functioning comics page out of. I didn't have time to enjoy suddenly being a bigwig in comics. It was just, "Get the goddamned job done." I was pretty worn out most of that year, but I made a lot of money. Made more money than I've ever made before or since. That was fun. I got to do things like fly home to California for a friend's wedding and fly back.

KEN: *Okay, then why did you quit SWAMP THING? Did you leave because you didn't want SWAMP THING any more? Did you want to do something better?*

TOM: I knew all the time when I was doing SWAMP THING that **Bissette** and **Totleben** should've been doing it. They didn't know that I knew that, but I knew that. Especially **Bissette**. The second that I got it, **Bissette** called me up from Vermont and said, "Hey, Tom you ever need any help on SWAMP THING, remember your old pal Steve!" *(Laughter.)* Actually, when my SWAMP THING #4 came out — which a lot of people think is a great issue — I realized that where I was at was not where **Marty Pasko** was, as far as I didn't agree at all with the morals of the stories he was writing.

AL: *What were the morals?*

TOM: Well, like issue #4 was a take-off on the Atlanta child killings that were going on. I did the story, and besides the fact that I really didn't like the subject matter, the moral of the story was that the reason kids are brutalized and made victims is because they're not suspicious enough of the world around them, and the reason they're not suspicious enough is that they're watching television which is oversimplified namby-pamby MR. ROGER'S NEIGHBORHOOD-type stuff. The *reason* he said that watching that stuff was making our kids innocent, and therefore easy victims, is because he was writing Saturday morning cartoons and dealing with editors that restricted the hell out of him. He took it out in that issue. I thought that was just incredibly warped. The reason that kids are victimized is not because there's not enough suspicion and too much love. It's because there's not enough love and too much suspicion. He's got it 100% backwards.

AL: *So are you saying that Marty Pasko's a noodle head...* (Laughter.)

KEN: *Can we quote you on that?*

TOM: Naw, Marty's okay. He tried hard and he was real overworked. But **Pasko** is a very good writer. I was always amazed at his ability to construct a story and the mechanics of writing he had down very well, I felt. I just did not agree at all with his point of view of the world. I didn't like using my talents to expand his point of view.

AL: *Were all the SWAMP THINGS written by Marty Pasko?*

TOM: Yeah. All the ones I did. Around issue #4, I told Len, "Hey, I don't want to do this any more," and he said, "Well, at least finish the storyline we've got going." I said, "Okay." Of course, that storyline ended up lasting another eight issues. It was really warped. It was all about the anti-

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"It was back to Pasko-esque sick stuff."

Christ and this sweet little innocent girl turns out to be this demonic herald of the anti-Christ and Swamp Thing kills her in the end. You had this little girl who was kinda out of place in a SWAMP THING comic book anyway, because the male teenage audience that reads that stuff doesn't want a cute little innocent girl in there. She didn't belong. They all hated her and they all kind of wanted her to get killed. I could feel all this, "kill that little girl," energy going all around me...

AL: *Sounds like a pleasant job.*

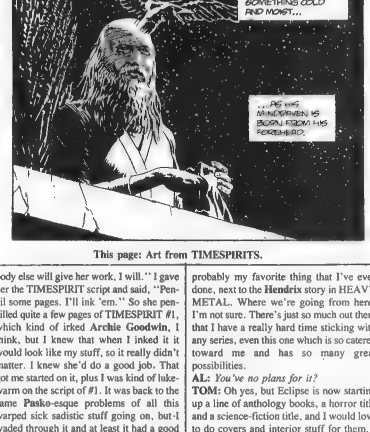
TOM: Yeah. So I quit SWAMP THING when we finally wrapped up that storyline. I called Steve and John, and told Len and Marty, "Don't worry, because once these guys come in you're gonna forget all about me." Meanwhile, **Steve Bissette's** old Vermont buddy **Steve Perry** comes onto the scene. He's a comic-book dealer, and he wants to write comics. He knows that I'm available now, and he knows that I like Indians, so he writes this story for EPIC ILLUSTRATED that we were going to do as a black-and-white EPIC ILUSTRATED story called "Indian Spring." It's based on a true story about an Indian chief in the 1630s who was fed up with the English soldiers wiping out their villages. This chief captured a British warship and controlled the whole north coast around Maine and Massachusetts and he whipped all the British fleet's asses. They couldn't capture him. The only reason that he finally lost is that when he lost a ship, he couldn't rebuild one. He had to capture another one. In other words, the British could keep building more and eventually he lost out.

KEN: *They outproduced them.*

TOM: Which is the same way we won the West — we outnumbered them. Anyway, it was a neat story. He wanted to do a version of that for EPIC, but Archie said, "Well, it's a neat story, but we need some science-fiction, some fantasy in there or we can't do it for EPIC." So then it started metamorphosing into the TIMESPIRITS series. In the interim, though, I did jobs at Pacific and I helped **Al Williamson.**

KEN: *Did you start working on TIMESPIRITS after you moved to California?*

TOM: I was supposed to have it started before I moved to California, in December of '83. But I knew I was going to be late on the book. Another person who was in our class at the first year of the **Kubert** school was a gal named **Cara Sherman**, a really good artist who for some reason never got any work. I bumped into Cara at the 4th of July con, summer of '83. She wasn't doing anything, so I kind of like had her in the back of my head, and thought, "Shit, if nobody else will give her work, I will." I gave her the TIMESPIRIT script and said, "Pencil some pages. I'll ink 'em." So she pencilled quite a few pages of TIMESPIRIT #1, which kind of irked **Archie Goodwin**, I think, but I knew that when I inked it it would look like my stuff, so it really didn't matter. I knew she'd do a good job. That got me started on it, plus I was kind of lukewarm on the script of #1. It was back to the same **Pasko**-esque problems of all this warped sick sadistic stuff going on, but I waded through it and at least it had a good ending. The good guys won out in the end and love prevailed and all that stuff. Number 2 and *3* was a story that I really loved. I enjoyed doing that. TIMESPIRITS *#2* is



This page: Art from TIMESPIRITS.

probably my favorite thing that I've ever done, next to the **Hendrix** story in HEAVY METAL. Where we're going from here, I'm not sure. There's just so much out there that I have a really hard time sticking with any series, even this one which is so catered toward me and has so many great possibilities.

AL: *You've no plans for it?*

TOM: Oh yes, but Eclipse is now starting up a line of anthology books, a horror title and a science-fiction title, and I would love to do covers and interior stuff for them. I could probably even write some of my own stories, which would be a great opportunity for me to try writing my own stuff. But I can't do that *and* TIMESPIRITS!

AL: *Have you decided to do any more than six issues of TIMESPIRITS?*

TOM: Well, the contract's for six, so I'm definitely doing six. After that, I'm still up in the air. I will probably do at least two more. What I would really like is for someone else to take over TIMESPIRITS for me, somebody who could do this kind of work satisfactorily. It's a book that needs to be out there. I like the fact that we have two non-white heroes in it, things like that.

AL: *How about just getting an inker instead of pencilling and inking it?*

TOM: My pencils and my inking are such that it's one thing for me. I just draw it. It's hard for me to separate the two. Although if I had a penciller that I was really excited about, I wouldn't be adverse to just inking.

AL: *How about Cara Sherman?*

TOM: I sent her a Christmas card and asked her if she'd like to and I haven't heard back... she's doing some big project for DC. So I guess she's busy. I would love to

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"I don't want to be part of this rat race."

be writing TIMESPIRITS myself, to tell you the truth. One real nice thing about TIMESPIRITS is that I have a deep love and appreciation of indigenous peoples. African tribesmen, American Indians, people like that. Their whole trips and world is just something that I find endlessly fascinating. I love movies and books about them. TIMESPIRITS is a good place to expound on that and try to show those aspects of their societies which I feel are superior to ours. Old movies are a real big influence on me, probably more so than a lot of artwork. At certain times, what I try to capture is the look of films made in the twenties and thirties, how they depicted, like, Queen Cleopatra's chambers. That's the look that I'm going for.

KEN: *It's black-and-white that gets you?*

TOM: That black-and-white is what I'm after. It never looks as good in color. **Alfred Hitchcock**'s an influence on me, but it's harder for me to grasp what he's doing and emulate it than the old historical **C. B. DeMille stuff.**

AL: *Hitchcock is beautifully visual, though.*

TOM: Stunning. I go to every **Hitchcock** movie I can and am in awe every minute of the thing. It's constant art. Every shot's a masterpiece. I don't know if I can grasp in my own work exactly what he's doing, but I hope that by watching as much as possible it'll rub off.

AL: *Osmosis. So what are your plans for the future? I heard that you were going to be interviewing Ken Macklin and...*

TOM: In the future, I hope to interview **Ken Macklin** and **Al Gordon** for **David Kraft**'s magazine.

AL: *Who are they?*

TOM: Aw, a couple of Northern Californian hippie types. They play guitar and draw pictures of dwarves. I am weirded out by the current world situation. That seems to play on my mind a lot. I might find myself in some sort of public service/or activities along the lines of...

AL: *Extra-curricular from comics?*

TOM: Yeah. In comics could I be a positive influence more than if I were to join the Peace Corps, go to Africa, or go to Nicaragua? Sometimes comics seem awful impotent or inconsequential in the overall scheme of things. Like **Bogey** saying to **Paul Henried** and **Ingrid Bergman** that "The problems of two or three people don't amount to a hill o' beans in this screwy world we live in."

AL: *But we'll always have Paris.*

TOM: We'll always have Paris.

KEN: *Well, comics may be inconsequential in the great scheme of things, but...*

TOM: But that's all I've got right now. That's the limited tool I've got.

A COMICS INTERVIEW exclusive: Unpublished art for TIMESPIRITS.

Timespirits © & TM 1985 Steve Perry & Tom Yeates

"We think the world's at our feet, but

KEN: *There's a very limited amount of things that any individual human being can do. I've always had the belief that if you're sincere in what you endeavor in, then that manifests itself in making the world a better place as far as you can have an influence.*

AL: *And if you're selling 47,000 copies, that's at least 47,000 people who are taking an interest in your stuff, and if you can influence one out of that 47,000 to do something good, or two, then you've done better than just you doing something good.*

TOM: But what is the influence that I have, and is it something good? I'm not writing the scripts — I'm just drawing somebody else's story. We're working right now on an episode where the Timespirits go to Central America. I talked to a peace activist who's been there a number of time and has been really active in trying to stop all the war that's going on there now. I showed him my work, and on the one hand he really wanted to help me out because he saw that I was sincere about trying to be a positive influence on this ugly scene. On the other hand, he didn't dig that there was all this violence and sexism — what he viewed as violence and sexism — in the comic. He said, "I've dedicated my life toward peace. Here I look at this and. . . " It's somebody who's coming into it cold. He was a pretty neat guy. So I wonder. . . that's what I'm thinking about when I'm drawing, but is that the message that's getting out to people?

KEN: *I've given it a bit of thought myself, because I loved comics so much when I was growing up, and used to read all these super-hero comics with all this violent stuff going on all the time. How has this affected my views toward world politics and peace? Possibly not at all. I don't think it's made me a Republican or. . .*

TOM: Listen, you know, I do think there's such a thing as a good Republican. Our friend **Torrin** approached me with an idea he had for a yeti story that said the yeti are actually a race of Nepalis or Tibetians, the natives that liven in a hidden valley in the Himalayas, where there's a leakage of some natural radioactive gas that comes out of the earth. It's a real gas that really exists. This gas leaked into these people's village and mutated them into what we know as Yetis. I met **Country Joe McDonald** of Country Joe and the Fish — he's really into comic books. .

AL: *You meet any of the Fish?*

TOM: No. I just met **Country Joe**, he's into comic books and he was talking to me about how it's such a drag that in comic books when somebody is exposed to radiation, they evolve into something. . .

AL: *Positive.*

TOM: Interestng, whereas in real life when

Ken Macklin original.

you're exposed to radiation, you shrivel up and die. You don't do anything. It's debilitating. If Spider-Man had been bitten by a radioactive spider, he would've shrivelled up and died. I mean, how many comic-book characters have gotten their powers. . . you guys know more about super-heroes than I do. . .

AL: *Almost all of them.*

TOM: From some radioactive mishap?

AL: *Most of Marvel's. The Hulk. . .*

KEN: *The Fantastic Four.*

AL: *The Hulk was a Gamma ray bomb. Daredevil was a radioactive, they changed it but theoretically it was a radioactive isotope falling from an out of control truck.*

TOM: Now what about the hundreds of thousands of kids who grow up living and breathing those stories? What about the kids who grew up loving that stuff and wishing they could be like Spider-Man or something, what is their subconscious reaction going to be to radiation in their day-to-day life?

AL: *I don't think it's relative.*

TOM: You don't think it has any effect on them?

AL: *I grew up with that stuff and I know radioactivity is poisonous. . . always known it.*

TOM: I don't think that comics need to be scientifically accurate, but I don't dig them perpetrating untruths in a big way that are harmful. I was trying to tell this peace activitist I was talking to, in order to get the message across, you've got to get the kid to buy the comic book. If it doesn't have socko whammo spills and thrills, you're not going to get his attention. He's going to leave it on the stand and whatever you've got to say to him he won't pick up on it.

KEN: *You know the whole Frederick Wertham trip in SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT?*

TOM: Well, run it by us for the sake of the interview. . .

KEN: *One of his big trips was that 97% of all the juvenile delinquents in America in 1954 read comic books. Therefore, comics were responsible for juvenile delinquency. This is nonsense because 97% of the non-juvenile delinquents also read comics. It was irrelevant. I still view the effect of violence in comics upon the youth of America along the same line.*

TOM: But don't you think that what goes around comes around? If you live in a world where there is violence constantly depicted around you, in the movies and in TV and in the comic books you read, it's got to come back out?

KEN: *Could be. Not so much because there's violence depicted. . . you can depict violence in a comic book, but not as a solution.*

TOM: For me, it's all in how you do it. I believe in the King Arthur philosophy of might for right. If you're doing it for the right reason. . . but then you've got to decide what the right reason is.

KEN: *Steve Ditko would certainly agree with you.*

TOM: Steve Ditko?

KEN: *He's one of the amazing moralists of comics history.*

AL: *He's a self-righteous guy, too.*

KEN: *I think he's got a point.*

TOM: But then I get caught in this thing. I like [illegible] thrills-and-spills adventure. However, there's the other side of that argument, which says that it's wrong to depict violence as fun. You should show it as it really is, so that people will know that it's not good. But *then* there are people who see what it's really like and dig it. Get into it. Yet I consider the extreme violence of **Greg Irons** or **Bissette** as "Art." They are really expressing a sincere response to our world. . . how come our society has so much more than other societies? I think more people agitates the problem, but it's not the cause.

AL: *Are we more violent?*

TOM: I think we are. I mean, I can walk down the street in Hong Kong, in Katmandu, in most European cities, or any other country I've been to without feeling I have to put on some macho **Clint Eastwood** negative front to keep the creeps at bay.

AL: *Arab countries where they cut your hands off for stealing?*

we don't have our act together at all."

"THE UNTAMED" — from the collection of Susan Balinski. Previously unpublished.

"Girls are everywhere, Al."

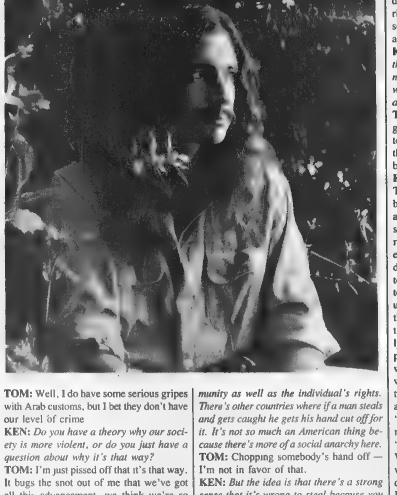

Photo: Linda Edwards

TOM: Well, I do have some serious gripes with Arab customs, but I bet they don't have our level of crime

KEN: *Do you have a theory why our society is more violent, or do you just have a question about why it's that way?*

TOM: I'm just pissed off that it's that way. It bugs the snot out of me that we've got all this advancement, we think we're so great, we're so arrogant and think that the whole world's at our feet, but we don't have our act together at all. What good is having all the planes and mass transit and mass media and all this stuff that we've got if we can't get along with each other? It doesn't do anything for me at all. I'd go live with the Nepalis, except that I've been spoiled and would miss my records...

AL: *Girls?*

TOM: No. Girls are everywhere, Al.

AL: *Oh*

TOM: Well, I think how people react to each other is what counts, how they treat each other.

AL: *I think people react to each other by how they manifest their own reality. The reality of the United States is pretty strange, man.*

KEN: *We've lost a lot of the sense of what a man's sense of responsibility is to his community as well as the individual's rights. There's other countries where if a man steals and gets caught he gets his hand cut off for it. It's not so much an American thing because there's more of a social anarchy here.*

TOM: Chopping somebody's hand off — I'm not in favor of that.

KEN: *But the idea is that there's a strong sense that it's wrong to steal because you have a greater sense of responsibility toward your fellow man.*

TOM: It's not just the punishment. Not committing a crime because you know you'll be punished is bullshit. Don't commit a crime because you *don't want* to commit a crime. I see people thinking that there's crime because the punishment isn't bad, because the courts are too lenient. It has a little bit to do with it, but the consideration about the penalty for committing a crime always comes about after the fact that someone wants to do it in the first place. It's weird the level of crime here, that's for sure. It's kind of strange to be in the middle of it as far as comic books being this mass media thing, very trendy oriented and what's hep now... they make the same type of comic books as they do TV shows, pop music, movies, the same genre stuff as what's happening. I think that even the pure escapism that is done has got to be a reflection of where the people who were writing and drawing it were at. They're going to draw what's on their minds, even if it is stories about other planets, there's going to be some cause-and-effects of where their lives are.

KEN: *Yeah. I'm wondering how many of the themes are set by the creators and how many of the themes are sort of directed where people in the comics company with an eye toward the market want them to go?*

TOM: A lot of it's supply and demand. It's got to be based on what sells. That's the bottom line, but I know that there's a lot of things that I always wanted to do that I have been told just won't fly or will...

KEN: *That there's no market for it.*

TOM: I met **Alex Toth** once, and I remember talking to him about similar things from a more philosophical point of view about sick stuff done in this graphic way. He was really turned off to it, much more so than even I am, because I'm kind of in the middle of it and grew up with it and so I have to pull myself away and look at it objectively to see that it really is weird, whereas he grew up in a much different era, when although there was a lot of violence around I'm sure that it wasn't presented quite so graphically, or as single-mindedly. He was just real put off that the editors at DC, Marvel, wherever, would take scripts like that and weren't encouraging or looking for other types of material as far as the consciousness and mentality of the storylines. I said, "Probably supply and demand," and he got really outraged as only **Toth** can and said, "Well how do they know it wouldn't sell? Why don't they try it? They don't know it wouldn't sell. They haven't tried it. How do they know?"

KEN: *My come back is always, "Why aren't you?" Put your money where your mouth is and see.*

TOM: That's what I'd like to do with TIMESPIRITS, although **Steve Perry**, the guy who writes it, is really caught up in the current fad of the media and weird horror movies. He and **Bissette** sit in front of their VCRs for hours on end watching these burnt horror movies that probably didn't even get theatrical release. We don't always agree on stuff. It's a bone of contenton with me, I'll read the scripts and it's like "God, I hate participating in this!" Sometimes. Going along with this trip that everybody's on. I feel like I just want to stop and say, "No, I don't want to do that. I don't want to be part of this rat race, and contribute to the beast." But then I get up in the morning and say, "Okay, if I'm not going to do that, then what am I going to do?" That can be kind of scary, too.

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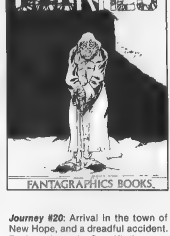

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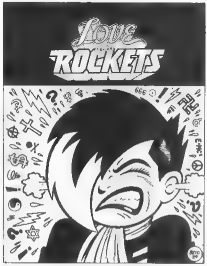

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"I write about ordinary people and what circumstances can cause them to do."

Ramsey Campbell has won more awards for his horror fiction than any other writer living, dead or undead. At fantasy conventions, he is the man who presents the awards — when he is not receiving them. Author Peter Straub describes him as: "Unique in the supernatural field."

He began his youth writing with the encouragement of August Derleth, and had his first collection published by Arkham House in 1964, under the title THE INHABITANT OF THE LAKE AND OTHER LESS WELCOME TENANTS. He worked as a tax officer and in libraries before becoming a full-time writer in 1973. A string of highly acclaimed novels bear Ramsey Campbell's by-line, among them: THE DOLL WHO ATE HIS MOTHER; THE FACE THAT MUST DIE; TO WAKE THE DEAD (retitled THE PARASITE in the US); THE NAMELESS; and, of course, INCARNATE. DEMONS BY DAYLIGHT and THE HEIGHT OF THE SCREAM are collections of his short stories, and the British volume DARK COMPANIONS reprints his greatest works. He has also edited three anthologies of horror: SUPERHORROR; NEW TERRORS (Volumes One and Two); and NEW TALES OF THE CTHULHU MYTHOS.

A man of seemingly unending energy, Ramsey also finds time to broadcast as a film and literary critic, to write as a columnist for HALLS OF HORROR magazine, and to act as president of the British Fantasy Society.

A warm and generous man, Ramsey was delighted to take an opportunity to address comic-book fans, for he is also a devotee of the field. In fact, he dedicated his DEMONS BY DAYLIGHT collection to Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Barry Smith, Denny O'Neil and Neal Adams. He talks often about comics, especially the old EC horror and science-fiction series. In Liverpool, he can often be found browsing through the latest imports at Ogre Books or at Chapter One — two of the best specialty shops in the north of England.

Of Ramsey, author Stephen King says: "Campbell is literate in a field which has attracted too many comic-book intellects, cool in a field where too many writers — myself included — tend toward panting melodrama, fluid in a field where many of the best practitioners fall prey to cant and stupid 'rules' of fantasy composition."

Photo: Francie Parker

RAMSEY CAMPBELL

"Wrightson — a man with a mind after my

ALI KARIM: *It's Friday the thirteenth. My name is Ali Karim.*

JOHN PARKER: *My name is John Parker.*

RAMSEY CAMPBELL: Yes? Who the hell am I? I'm going into the red on the recorder, I know that — *The Red Flashing!* My name is **Ramsey Campbell**, and that's all I'm gonna tell you right now.

JOHN: *Let's start with something about your youth — what were your reading habits?*

RAMSEY: Something about my youth? We're getting into thorny territory already. I really didn't read comics to any extent when I was a kid because, about the time I was buying things off my own bat, age 9 or 10, was precisely the point at which questions were being asked in Parliament about the horror comics. I remember once encountering a horror comic, whose name I've never really been able to remember, torn up in a gutter in 1955, and peering over these stunningly lurid images which, of course, had no narrative sense at all — which didn't seem to matter. That was my last experience with horror comics for maybe fifteen years, until the EC classics started to be reprinted in one form or another.

I did read THE EAGLE, so I got Dan Dare and the good British puritanism. Kid comics were all that I was into at the time, and science-fiction and fantasy magazines. There had been short-lived British editions of magazines like WEIRD TALES, which had not gone for very long and had not done particularly well.

ALI: *The ECs and other American stuff got imported, at least until they were stopped by Parliament, but the British editions were compilations. Do you think this was detrimental in any way to the quality?*

RAMSEY: Yes, that's right. They were run off in black-and-white. You missed all that color — all that misregistered color — and that's a pity. Although, on the other hand, done right, the way **Russ Cochran** does them — the black-and-whites look extremely good. All the detail is perfect. In some ways I'd rather have those **Russ Cochran** editions of the ECs than a genuine EC on yellowed paper that's beginning to crumble at the edges, as I've certainly found in one or two of my genuines. I keep them in plastic bags and never take them out to look at 'em because I'm too scared to risk it.

JOHN: *How did you discover EC?*

RAMSEY: Through the old Ballantine paperbacks, basically. They did TALES FROM THE CRYPT, VAULT OF HORROR — a couple of them, in the late Sixties. I particularly remember **Graham Ingels**' variation of "The Monkey's Paw," where the chap is wished back but he's full of embalming fluid. The payoff of the story is that, so impossible is it for him to die, his wife attempts to chop him up — which is done at considerable length in a fairly reticent image. It was extremely powerful. It strikes me that maybe that's where the famous scene in THE EVIL DEAD comes from — where the unfortunate possessed people have got to be chopped limb-from-limb and don't even then stop moving.

ALI: *Anybody who's a stalwart in the field will have looked up and seen your letter in TWO-FISTED TALES...*

RAMSEY: Yes! "**Campbell** appears in TWO-FISTED TALES" — that was quite a first! That was one of the two things — the other was to appear in WEIRD TALES magazine, which didn't seem very likely since it went bust when I was 8 years old. Ultimately, I *did* appear in WEIRD TALES magazine, when **Lin Carter** edited — before he fled the country, but that's another story.

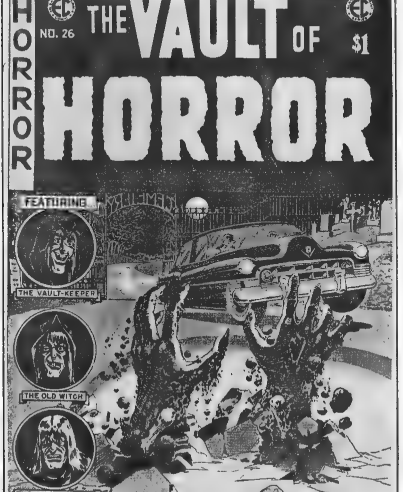
ALI: *Do you think that ECs are relevant to the present generation?*

RAMSEY: Yes. They are certainly relevant in the sense that they are the source material for TWISTED TALES and ALIEN WORLDS. They are so influential on what's going on today. **Steve King** obviously acknowledges the influences. You can virtually imagine a story like "The Crate" being drawn by **Wally Wood** — who is, alas, no longer with us — or **Jack Davis**. For me, as a writer, they seem especially relevant.

ALI: *You are one of a whole generation, really, of writers who derive some sort of input from the EC stable...*

RAMSEY: It's true enough — but the odd thing about it, of course, was that I didn't read them at the time. I actually came to them in the late Sixties. They did still work very well for me, but I didn't have the

A Johnny Craig EC cover for THE VAULT OF HORROR.



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own. Humor and horror are inseparable."

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nostalgia, and I think that's one of the problems with writing professionally. You do sometimes find that your mind begins to skip ahead of the narrative. You find yourself thinking, "Ah, well — they're obviously not going to go for this ending because it's going to be a twist." For me, unfortunately, it becomes a compulsion. When I'm reading these stories, like it or not, I'll say, "Oh, my Lord!" because I know what's going to happen at the end — and indeed, sometimes I'm right. It's rather like a detective story where the reader and the writer or the artist are playing the game of who is going to get to the ending first.

ALI: *Do you ever turn to the last page and scan the last panel before you actually get to it?*

RAMSEY: I always take a blank piece of paper and cover up the panels until I actually get to them. That keeps you from skipping ahead and blowing the ending. I suppose some part of me is a traditionalist — I've always liked the fundamentally rather disciplined layout of the EC stories. You nearly always have this very linear layout where you've got two panels on top, two panels in the middle, and two panels on the bottom — until **Bernie Krigstein** came along and sort of blew it all apart.

ALI: *The EC narrative is very distinctive, very terse and to the point — but also very descriptive. Do you think that structure reflects your own work as well?*

RAMSEY: Yes, I suppose that's true. You do have this sort of blocking process — blocks of description, blocks of narrative, and so forth. It's something I've been getting away from in later books.

JOHN: *I find that in a lot of EC stories, whether it's sick or not, you've got to laugh when you get to the twist. What about humor in horror?*

RAMSEY: Yeah, I know what you mean. There were times when you couldn't quite tell where TALES FROM THE CRYPT ended and MAD began. Later on, you'd find something like PLOP, the DC comic, which had that appalling **Wrightson** story about the guy and the froglegs. *(Laughter.)*

ALI: *"The Gourmet." It was recently reprinted.*

RAMSEY: Delighted to hear it. Yes, they should keep that one in print for a long time to come. **Wrightson** — there's a man with a mind after my own, I think.

Humor and horror are actually inseparable, in the main: In the best stories, you'll always find them. I'm not a great believer in comic relief. I suppose it was particularly a Hammer Film tradition, where you had the funny porter come running up and do his little two-minute cameo and then run away so that the monsters could come back again — so we've all had our laugh before the next shock. No, I'm much more a believer in going on to the end of the situation you're writing about however much the potential for absurdity may be there. You've actually got to risk absurdity in horror fiction.

"With all due respect to Tom Savini, I think that Berni Wrightson can draw a better monster than he came up with in the film." From the CREEPSHOW graphic novel.

It's the reticence of the kind of respectable sort of horror fiction which bothers me. There seems to be a sort of terrible kind of "raising the level" to a literary form, as if it weren't there already. The novel INTERVIEW WITH A VAMPIRE seems to me an example of that kind of thing. I get the feeling of a writer coming along and saying, "I am going to make this into literature" — not realizing it already was. Perhaps it is unfair to call INTERVIEW WITH A VAMPIRE a particular example of that, but I'm sure you know the kind of thing I mean.

ALI: *The movie CREEPSHOW didn't do tremendously well in Britain, but in the States was really successful. They're planning a sequel. Do you think that it tended itself well to humor and horror — "The Most Fun You'll Have Being Scared," as it was labeled?*

RAMSEY: Yes, I think it did it pretty well, actually. I thought Steve's own episode, the one where he was the progressively-more-green farmer, was perhaps the weakest because it was, sad to say, just a joke. There was nothing wrong with it, but I think it didn't have that edge of the macabre that it might have needed. On the other hand, I very much liked "Father's Day." That got it perfectly, the tone of the joke which is simultaneously very gruesome, so that at the end your reaction is a shudder and a laugh. That's one of the things that EC did very often.

ALI: *In the film, the "Father's Day" segment had actual captions. That was probably the truest form of a comic book in the film. I found that rather campy, to my taste . . .*

RAMSEY: It's a bit distracting, but I didn't think it was particularly campy. It did seem to me rather like **Steve King** and **George Romero** paying their dues to something they particularly admired — that they were trying to film a comics format as fully as possible. If you remember, in the film, you actually get a glimpse of a letters page. You can't read the thing, but my impression was that they'd actually done a complete parody of a letters column page, the kind you would see in an EC comic.

JOHN: *Did you like the CREEPSHOW adaptation by King and Wrightson?*

RAMSEY: I think it was patchy but interesting. Some things, such as "The Crate," actually came off better in the comic. With all respect to **Tom Savini**, I think that **Berni Wrightson** can draw a better monster than he came up with in the film. On the other

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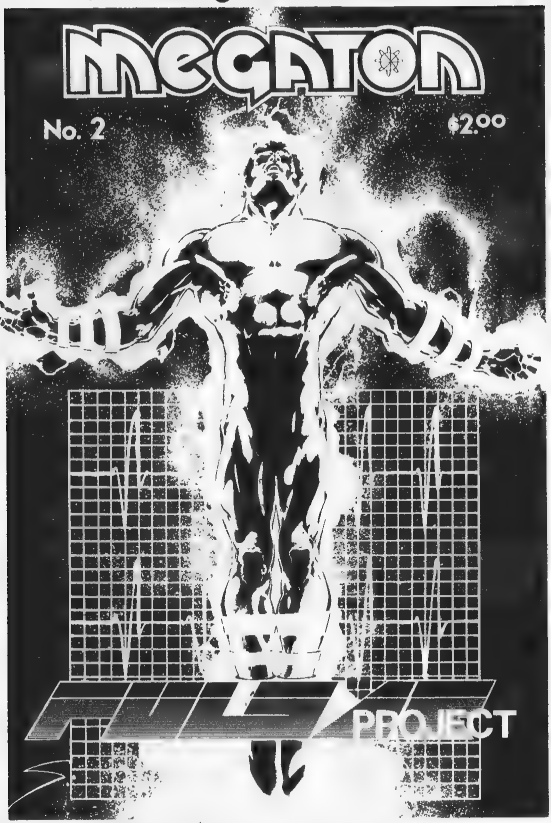

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"I like Wrightson looking like Wrightson."

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hand, some of it does look hastily drawn — without the heart actually being there. I didn't think the last two stories came off very well. I was more interested to see what **Steve King** felt was significant, that he'd written in the film, that he wanted to keep in the comic. It interested me very much that the one segment has the American national anthem going on over the image of the guy blowing his head off. This clearly has some satiric point to it.

JOHN: *But you thought that there was something lacking in the art?*

RAMSEY: Mainly, I suppose, it looks a lot like **Wrightson** in his most **Graham Ingels**-esque style, and why not — but I quite like **Wrightson** looking more like **Wrightson.**

JOHN: *As in FRANKENSTEIN?*

RAMSEY: Yes, as in FRANKENSTEIN! That's **Wrightson** doing what he really wanted to do, I strongly suspect! I think a lot of it is really quite magnificent — like "I Shall Be With You On Your Wedding Night."

ALI: *Fantastic detail.*

RAMSEY: Yes, extreme detail! There's also a sort of gloomy claustrophobia of the whole thing — the man closed in by all the chemical jars and what have you. That's very powerful!

JOHN: *And it seems to you to be closer to his heart than CREEPSHOW?*

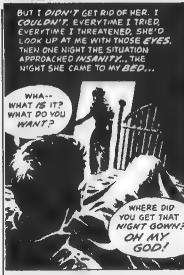
RAMSEY: Yes. Some projects seem to me to be kept so long as pet projects that when they finally come to fruition they're kind of stale. I felt the film GANDHI was one such. The **Wrightson** FRANKENSTEIN seems to me to be a man at the height of his powers. I very much hope we might see more of this sort of thing from him.

JOHN: *I presume you're familiar with his SWAMP THING?*

RAMSEY: Yes. I liked that very much. That was my main period of comics buying, in fact, so I got every SWAMP THING. I no longer have them, alas — amazingly stupid move on my part. I remember the full-page werewolf from #4 — superb. I remember that extraordinarily **Lovecraftian** story in which he confronted this protoplasmic, tentacled thing in ah abyss. I remember "The Patchwork Man" with particular affection — the imagery is not unlike that of FRANKENSTEIN.

ALI: *Wrightson did several stories for Warren magazines that were Edgar Allan Poe based. What did you think of those?*

RAMSEY: The one I really remember is not based on **Poe** but on **Lovecraft**, his adaptation of "Cool Air." That was very potent. He wrote the script for that as well, but he's less good with dialogue than he is as an artist — but why not? Certainly, I'm


BUT I DIDN'T GET RID OF HER. I COULDN'T. EVERYTIME I TRIED EVERYTIME I THREATENED, SHE'D LOOK UP AT ME WITH THOSE EYES. THEN ONE NIGHT THE SITUATION APPROACHED INSANITY... THE NIGHT SHE CAME TO MY BED...
WHA-- WHAT IS IT? WHAT DO YOU WANT?
WHERE DID YOU GET THAT NIGHT GOWN? OH MY GOD!

less good as an artist than I am as a writer. I remember the final full-page image of that very potently — which I suspect **Lovecraft** would not have been entirely ashamed of. The other one I remember is "Jennifer" — about the man who finds the unfortunate lady about to be done away with in the woods. That's astonishingly powerful. The most disturbing image of all is the one on the bed; the overhead shot in the dark when Jennifer has got into bed with him. That really is a nightmare done with great reticence, with just what he needs to put over its power.

JOHN: *That story was written by Bruce Jones.*

RAMSEY: Ah, really!

JOHN: *You've read TWISTED TALES?*

RAMSEY: The first five issues, much to my delight — and I shall get the rest of them as soon as I can. What pleased me, opening #1, was to see the guy talking not only about the fact he admires the ECs — which he clearly does, and quite right, too — but quoting influences like **Geoff Conklin**'s MACABRE READER and **Charlotte Perkins Gilman**'s "The Yellow Wallpaper," and **Lovecraft** and Arkham House and so forth. It certainly seems to me that somebody with that kind of background in the horror *genre*, as a whole, has what he needs to draw upon. Too many people, I fear, lack that at the moment. People are coming in at the contemporary and not going back and looking through the tradition. **Bruce Jones** clearly has the tradition.

ALI: *You say they draw upon older themes, which is very interesting . . .*

RAMSEY: To some extent, yes. I don't mean to suggest that he's copying, just that there are moments that suggest the influences. ALIEN WORLDS had moments of **Bradbury**. One of the most disturbing of the stories, in many ways, is "Me An' Ol' **Rex**." *(Laughter.)* This is one of the things, you see, that I felt about EC — I did sometimes manage to spot the endings. But **Bruce Jones** clearly managed to bring it off more than once in TWISTED TALES. Particularly what I admire of him is his ear for dialogue, which seems to me to be as good as any I've encountered.

ALI: *Do you think stagey dialogue, as it were, is a problem in a great number of horror comics?*

RAMSEY: Yes. They have a kind of stiffness in speech, and there are some comics

Above and below: from "Jenifer" by Berni Wrightson and Bruce Jones.

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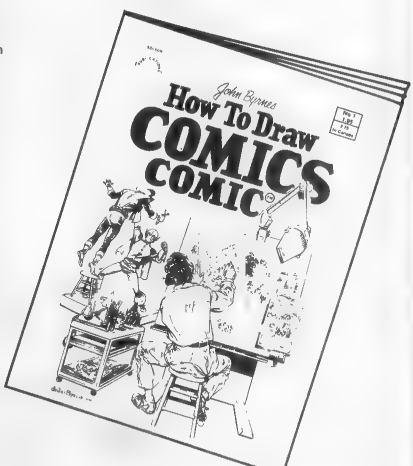

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"Many horror comics just weren't too good."

that don't quite make it even in terms of the narrative — like PSYCHO and NIGHTMARE from Skywald. They had a peculiar sort of hallucinatory quality to the narrative. The syntax didn't quite always hit where it was going and it tended to drift off into some nether realm. It was sort of like listening to somebody talking in their sleep. *(Laughter.)* Getting back to TWISTED TALES, I thought that, extremely well drawn that it is, "The Well" didn't quite gel. Mind you, we're supposed to make something from that date — October 10, 1954. This would be the date of the Congressional hearings — so in a sense this is a story saying, "Look, we can now do it again." Fair enough — but it's perhaps EC at its sillier. I can't quite see how this curious creature down in the well is able to mate with human women with quite such little difficulty — but maybe he knows something I don't. *(Laughter.)* But then you get this story "Nick of Time," which seems at first to be an extremely unpleasant story about sadism towards women, then turns out to be nothing of the kind.

ALI: *It's a counter action to all those slasher-type stories. He's a perceptive writer.*

RAMSEY: He's intelligent, yes. He knows what he's doing more often than not — as often as any of us, God knows.

ALI: *The one I really wanted you to talk about is "Banjo Lessons."*

RAMSEY: The thing about that was the co-editor, **April Campbell**, actually took her editorial on the inside front cover to talk about the fact that — although the sentiments of the protagonist are racist — the story is not intended to condone it. We're meant to take away that this is actually a diatribe against it. I thought it was mainly a story about a fear of latent homosexuality. But perhaps I was wrong. I suppose the overt theme is of the kind of extremism to which racism can go. Clearly, the story does this deliberately as a caricature. The only thing that bothered me was **April Campbell**'s editorial. I'm a firm believer, as a writer, in saying that if I can't write it in the story then I oughtn't to take the opportunity of telling you in the introduction what I meant and didn't quite get right. I actually felt they got it right.

ALI: *About ten years ago, there was a glut of horror comics on the market. They've declined over the years and even HOUSE OF MYSTERY has been cancelled. Any thoughts on the gap in the field?*

RAMSEY: Horror fiction and horror films are certainly doing well. Perhaps they are not reaching the same audience. Then again, it could be that there were too many horror comics that just weren't too good. There was a sort of pretentiousness that certainly was there in the Skywald things, particularly in the writing, that even crept into many of the good comics, even the Warrens. I think maybe TWISTED TALES pointed the way out with its quality. Maybe it's quality that wins out — a good sign for us all, I think.

ALI: *You said there were touches of Bradbury in ALIEN WORLDS. What did you think of the story "Talk To Tedi"?*

RAMSEY: I thought the spelling of Tedi was a rather wicked joke on the part of **Bruce Jones!**

ALI: *I saw it as a version of LASSIE COME HOME.* (Laughter.)

RAMSEY: You really want this rotting Teddy bear to come in through the window at the end, do you? This is very curious. I wouldn't want Lassie to come home after it had been through all that — not for nothing! *(Laughter.)* I suspect there's a more macabre ending to the story than we've been let in on. I did like it, actually.

ALI: *What did you think of "Dark Passage"?*

RAMSEY: That's a strange one. It seems very like **Bradbury** at his most sentimental.

JOHN: *Talking about Bradbury, we've got DINOSAUR TALES here, which is illustrated. Do you see any relevance in illustrating this sort of thing?*

RAMSEY: Yes, if the illustrator has his own insight into what's going on — it

"Wrightson doing what he really wanted to do." detail from FRANKENSTEIN.

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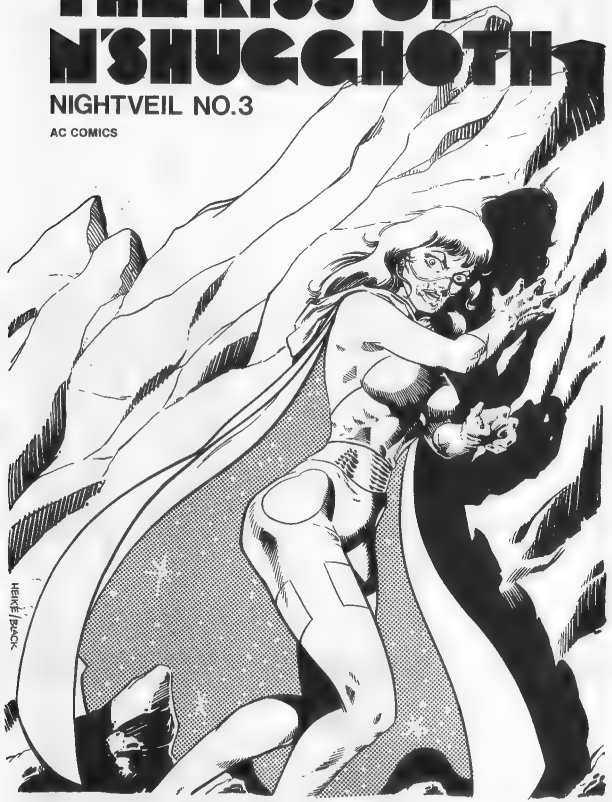


"There's good going on, so why desert comics?"

doesn't necessarily follow that he's got to be illustrating the writing literally. I think it's wrong to ask the artist to do anything of the kind; or film-makers to make literal versions of novels, if they've got their own insights.

JOHN: *Does it enhance the text, do you think?*

RAMSEY: I think it does — any good illustration does. That's something I loved about the old pulps.

JOHN: *Do you think your books could lend themselves well to the comics form?*

RAMSEY: I don't think the novels would, but I'd like to see them do some of my short stories. I did try to write some of them with a sort of comics continuity. "Heading Home" is like a **Johnny Craig** story that **Johnny Craig** never wrote — at least that's how I felt when I wrote it.

ALI: *A lot of American comics are being produced these days that are bypassing the Comics Code. Do you think this is a boon for the industry, or is it detrimental?*

RAMSEY: It seems to me that, since the best work is so good, it's got to be a bit of a sure thing. There is the risk, as happened in the Fifties, of their feeling the need to top themselves and jacking up the violence more and more and more, until it reaches an intolerable level. The same thing happened with the underground comics of the Sixties and Seventies. Really, it's a matter of personal taste. There are times to be reticent, and there are times to show something head on. TWISTED TALES had the instinct of when to do it and when not. The current stuff actually seems pretty restrained.

ALI: *Do you agree with First Comics' editor Mike Gold's resentment over the dumping by Marvel and DC of loads of reprint material onto the market?*

RAMSEY: I can picture, perhaps, how **Mr. Gold** feels; but I certainly don't feel that I ought to object to the republication of **Lovecraft** and **Poe**, and so on, just to make the way easier for me to get *my* books published. Hell, I'd be very unhappy with the notion that the tradition of the field was being wiped out. In the case of comics, a lot of people can't afford to get the originals, because they're so pricey — so it seems to me that reprints of the best of the earlier material are a good thing.

JOHN: *There are many writers in the horror genre who seem to have been influenced by the comics...*

RAMSEY: Not particularly influenced by them, I wouldn't have thought — though **Steve King** very clearly is. "Survivor Type" is a particularly ECish type of story — the first person narrative about the chap that eats himself. I don't particularly want to see that as a comic *(laughter)*, but in my darker moments I can visualize it as such. He seems to be among the few who are actually doing that as a form. I rather suspect that **Karl Wagner** is an EC admirer from way back, but I don't see the influence in his writing.

JOHN: *Are comic books respected among your colleagues in horror?*

NAKED AND GRASS-STAINED, HE WAS CRAWLING ALONG ABOUT FIVE FEET BEHIND THE MOWER, EATING THE CUT GRASS. GREEN JUICE RAN DOWN HIS CHIN AND DRIPPED ON HIS HUGE BELLY. HAROLD FELT HIS GUTS CHURN.

Stephen King's Lawnmowerman. Art: Walt Simonson.

RAMSEY: That's a fair question. I don't know, really. They are by some writers, certainly, but I suppose there may be some who rather look down on them. This may have something to do with the paranoid side of the business of horror writing — of being looked down upon and finding something to look down upon in turn.

JOHN: *Do you find that reading comic books tends to be a sort of transitional phase people go through on their way to more literary forms, and that those who still read the comics later in life are sort of stuck into only that?*

RAMSEY: No. It depends how big the rush is, how long you'll be reading comics, and for some it's big enough to carry all their lives. Most of the older people reading comics are reading lots of other things as well, so it's not really something you get "stuck into."

ALI: *In DANSE MACABRE, Stephen King seemed to say that comic-book fans should grow out of comics and pursue serious literature.*

RAMSEY: In addition to comics, is the way I would look at it. I certainly wouldn't regard comics as something that you say you did when you were a kid, but now that you're grown up you'll leave them behind to go on to literature with a capital L. There's good things going on there, so why desert comics? I'm sure that what Steve meant was that you need to progress to prose literature. You should expand yourself as far as possible.

JOHN: *Speaking of King and comics, did you think that the "Lawnmowerman" adaptation in BIZARRE ADVENTURES worked?*

RAMSEY: I thought it came pretty close to most of the things in the original story. There's a lot of witty touches in the art and in the actual writing.

1978 Stephen King Art 1981 Walt Simonson

"Steve King had a vasectomy, which is a

JOHN: *What about adaptations of film into comics — like ALIEN: THE ILLUSTRATED STORY by Goodwin and Simonson?*

RAMSEY: This seems to me to have been very good indeed. The chest-burster scene is very stylized and not at all offensive.

ALI: *The guy on the BBC program, WATCHDOG, got very upset about it because it was available to children. He thought it was gruesome.*

RAMSEY: Yes. He actually ripped it up on screen. The guy's obviously got as many muscles in his head as he has in his arms. *(Laughter.)*

JOHN: *You, yourself, are a film critic for local radio — how do you enjoy that sort of work?*

RAMSEY: If the film is good, fine. On the other hand, when it consists of sitting with two other people in an auditorium built for 600 in sub-zero temperatures and trying to raise a smile at YELLOWBEARD, the abominable Monty Python spitter, then it tends to get a bit taxing.

JOHN: *Do you get jaded by it?*

RAMSEY: No. I do occasionally get tired of it, and there are occasions where watching a movie at a press showing is injurious to a film. I've seen comedies that I thought were all right, and then found them very much more enjoyable with a large audience. On the other hand, I certainly prefer watching a **Hitchcock** movie, for example, without people rustling all about me.

JOHN: *Does it interfere with your writing?*

RAMSEY: No. What occasionally tends to happen is that the story I'm working on will creep into the back of my mind while I'm sitting through two hours of banal nonsense.

ALI: *If you watch a really good film, such as Hitchcock's recently-reissued REAR WINDOW, would it ever affect your writing?*

RAMSEY: Maybe having got that intensity of experience would make me write better, but I'm not conscious of ever being influenced directly. Well, a curious thing did happen when I saw ROCKY III. There's a scene in it where Rocky, who's lost the world title, goes to the guy he took it from at the end of ROCKY II and asks him to train him up to standard again. The chap agrees to do it on the one condition that Rocky promise him something, but he won't tell Rocky what until he's won back the title. At that very moment I thought, "Good God, there's a novel in that!" and dug out my notebook and started scribbling away. Unfortunately, I wasn't very aware of the last half-hour of the film, but I've just finished the book and it's called FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES.

JOHN: *You've adapted three films to print, I believe?*

RAMSEY: I did adaptations of THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN, THE WOLFMAN, and DRACULA'S DAUGHTER — all Universal horror films of the Thirties and Forties. They were three of a series of six written under a house name. The others, which I didn't write, were CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON, THE MUMMY, and THE WEREWOLF OF LONDON. They were all done under the reprehensible name of **Carl Dredgestone** *(laughter)*, which I made up in a weak moment. Nobody expected this to come back to haunt me, but there is morality in the world after all!

JOHN: *Is there any special technique in writing these sort of adaptations?*

RAMSEY: I think a novel can be written from a filmscript with as much care and as much creativity as a film can be directed from the same script. I appreciate that there are other ways that it's done, but there are cases where these books seem to have been written over a weekend with somebody just reading down the script and putting down a little bit of action between the lines of dialogue. It seemed important to me to convey a sense of the film as well as a sense of the script, which led to some interesting things. In both the script and the film of THE WOLFMAN the point is that Larry Talbot, the **Lon Chaney, Jr.** character who becomes the werewolf, comes back to Wales — this is Wales, Hollywood, you understand — his ancestral home, because his brother has died in a hunting accident. That's all there is in the script, basically, but in the film you get one shot of a portrait of **Lon Chaney, Jr.** This seemed to me to be extraordinarily suggestive — the whole notion of the other self having been killed off and then the feral self beginning to manifest itself for some reason. In a sense the books are also a form of criticism of the films — criticism in the best sense, of trying to bring out what's there

ALI: *Dennis Etchison has turned out some quite successful film adaptations.*

RAMSEY: Yes. He did THE FOG, HALLOWEEN II, HALLOWEEN III, and VIDEODROME — which I haven't read yet because I haven't seen the film. He writes sometimes as **Jack Martin.** What's particularly interesting is that **Jack Martin** dedicated a book to **Dennis Etchison** — which is something I must admit I'm rather tempted to do, pseudonymously dedicate something to myself. Dennis doesn't write much

good reason for not crossing the Atlantic."

like anybody else. There's a complete honesty, a complete lack of derivation, in his work. It reads like it's all been lived through on some level. He adapted THE FOG from the script rather than the finished film. I think he rather prefers scripts.

JOHN: *If a big Hollywood producer came to you to film one of your books, how much input would you demand?*

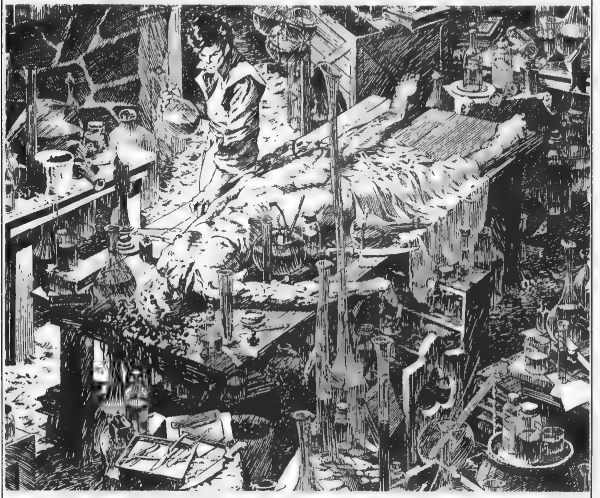
RAMSEY: I don't think I'd demand any. All that would really concern me would be that it be a good film. I wouldn't want a director who didn't care for the book at all, or who didn't care for the *genre*. Otherwise, it wouldn't matter to me if it was true to the book or not. The better the director the more creative he's going to be. There are many cases of films that are superior to the book.

ALI: *Stanley Kubrick's THE SHINING was a totally individual thing from the King novel. It upset many of the book's fans. Isn't there a danger, when fans get so attached to a book, of adapting too far away from the source, as it were?*

RAMSEY: It's interesting, in fact, that a great many science-fiction fans detested 2001, and a great many horror fans detested THE SHINING. I know Steve doesn't much care for it, which I think is not too surprising, but I actually liked the film very much indeed. It's not a film of the book and it's not frightening in the same way, but it did seem to me to be, in its own way, on its own terms, as successful as the book. What I particularly liked about it was the sort of sense of nightmare distortion that **Kubrick** managed even though he was using this enormous and in a way familiar hotel setting. The shot I've always particularly liked is the overhead shot of Jack looking down on a model of the maze — which isn't present in the novel — where you gradually notice there are little people walking around inside it, and then we come down to a fairly close shot of Wendy and Danny walking along one of the avenues. What I've never been able to work out, however many times I've seen the film — which I find remarkably disorienting — is whether we're seeing a model of the maze with miniature figures matted in or whether we're seeing an extremely high angle shot of a real maze. There are many moments in the film where either you're not sure what you are seeing or you're not certain how it relates to the characters who are perceiving it.

I must tell you, incidently, when **Steve King** was nearly the guest of honor at the British Fantasy Convention — until he had a vasectomy, which is a good excuse, I think, for not crossing the Atlantic *(laughter)* — we actually went to the trouble of getting a Room 217 sign for his room. It's a great pity that he didn't turn up. In the film you have **Jack Torrence** going into the room — which is 237 for some reason — and finding what appears to be a particularly desirable young lady who turns out to be a rotting old lady who's drowned in the

Wrightson "at the height of his powers." Detail — and lots of it — from FRANKENSTEIN.



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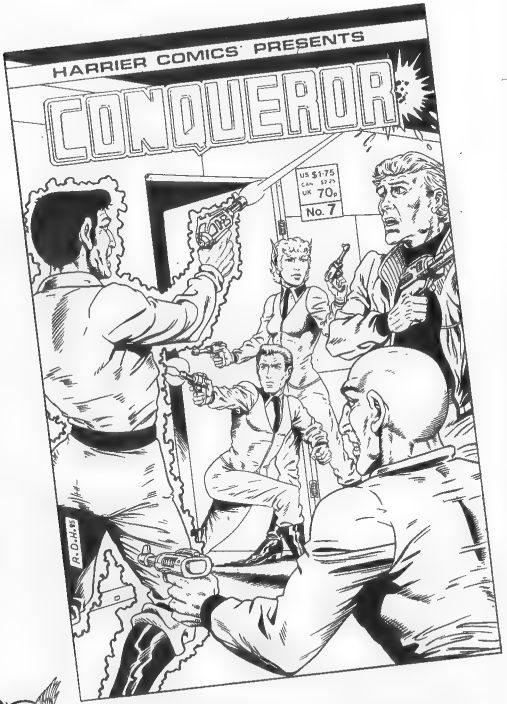

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bath. We see this from his viewpoint, but we also appear to be seeing it from Danny's, and he's lying terrified in bed and projecting it on to Halloran, the black cook, who is also seeing it and is also in a state of abject panic. The question becomes, are they somehow seeing what Jack is experiencing, or are they somehow causing it to happen to him? This wasn't really brought up in the book. On this level, it seemed to me that **Jack Nicholson**'s performance as a schizophrenic was entirely convincing. There are levels of the film that the fans have really not got on to. It's worth more than one viewing, even though I certainly wouldn't want to replace the book with it. They both deserve their place — pretty high, too.

ALI: *I think certain books, especially in the horror genre, are more adaptable for a cinematic point of view. Practically every book of Stephen King's is readily filmable. The only exception I can think of is THE STAND...*

RAMSEY: ...which is going to be filmed, anyway!

ALI: *Your quality is more ethereal, as with author Peter Straub's, I think.*

RAMSEY: I tend to go more for a prose effect. There are stories of mine — or moments in stories of mine — that depend on tricks of style, of the precise ordering of words and this kind of thing. This is something that I think is very important about the horror field. It's one of the last popular *genres* to predicate what it's doing on literary style. As the ranks of the illiterate close over our heads there are at least a few folks still scribbling away trying to get their words right. It's important that a popular *genre* is still making demands of this sort on its readership. But I don't think of my stories as being particularly anti-cinematic. Some of them are written with quite a few scenes more-or-less in visual terms. I actually put what amounted to a kind of tribute to **Hitchcock** in the first chapter of my first novel, THE DOLL WHO ATE HIS MOTHER — the scene where the policeman is talking too far away to be heard so that you can only see what he's saying by his gestures. It's very much like **Hitchcock** in that he was still directing what amounted to silent films to the end of his life — he was as rooted in the cinema as that.

JOHN: *I could see THE DOLL WHO ATE HIS MOTHER lending itself to film, and THE FACE THAT MUST DIE...*

RAMSEY: The one I think would do well on film is INCARNATE. It couldn't be done as a straight-forward horror film because it's not a straight-forward horror novel. It's very much about perceptions that turn out to be mistaken, that turn out in some ways different from what you saw. That seems to be an ideal challenge for a film-maker.

JOHN: *Another author, James Herbert, has had two of his novels made into film. There was an Australian one, THE SURVIVOR...*

RAMSEY: Yes — dreadful, dreadful — vapid, vapid — obscurantic!

ALI: *Herbert was very disappointed in it.*

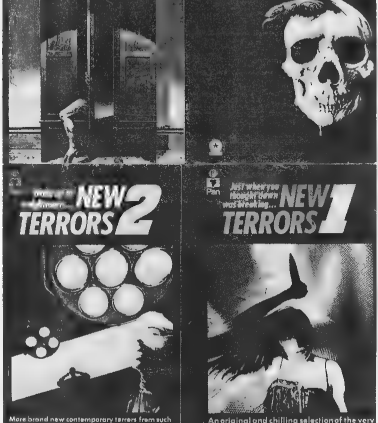
RAMSEY: I'm not surprised. I would like to see THE FOG, though presumably our censor would not be awfully kind to it.

ALI: *We're undergoing an Orwellian 1984 censorship nightmare in Britain right now...*

RAMSEY: Come and save us!

ALI: *Perhaps, Ramsey, you can tell the American readers what's actually happening?*

RAMSEY: Well, if I can do something without foaming at the mouth — I'll do my best to tell you in a reasonably articulate way. The video-recorder and the pre-recorded movie on videocassette has now become very popular in England — more so than in America, I believe. What was happening, which to my mind was a rather useful development, was that films were being released on cassette which had not got the censor certificate which you need to show a film in the cinema. There was an outcry about this. The extraordinary thing is that we're talking about films such as **Tobe Hooper**'s DEATH TRAP, which ap-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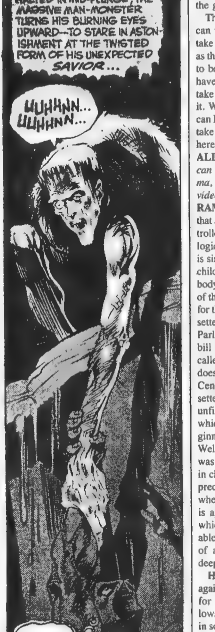
"More and more things are being banned."

pears to be more complete on cassette than the American audience will have seen. It had been cut by three minutes by our censor for showing in the cinemas, but I can't for the life of me tell you where the three minutes are from, though I've seen both versions. It seemed to me to be a perfectly legitimate movie — a sort of a remake of PSYCHO as a garishly colored comedy — but it started getting itself declared obscene and people were taking it to court. We have the National Viewers and Listeners Association here which is run by a lady called **Mrs. Mary Whitehouse**. She took DEATH TRAP to court, unless I'm very much mistaken — or her cronies did — and then the floodgates of censorship started opening. Of course, those responsible were saying the floodgates of obscenity had opened. When you're talking about films like DEATH TRAP and THE BURNING and so on, I think this is bullshit.

The most ludicrous case of all is the film THE BURNING, which to my mind was one of the better post-FRIDAY THE 13TH films — a distinctly better film than FRIDAY THE 13TH. The British censor cut three shots out of it, a total of fifteen seconds, for cinema release, but the version that went out on videocassette was the complete version. Then Scotland Yard and the police went around to videolibraries and actually seized copies for having the offending fifteen seconds in them and hauled them off. It got as bizarre as this. What they were actually saying was that it was okay to see somebody's fingers being chopped of with a pair of shears, but not okay to see the blood afterward. That's the logic of the position.

Then things got gradually worse. In fact, the cut version was seized. We're now getting cases where films like THE EVIL DEAD are being declared obscene. Perhaps the most grotesque example of all, so far, is the case of the **Michael Wadley** film WOLFEN, which is being called filthy and disgusting. This is the **Albert Finney** film about werewolves on Manhattan Island where you get to see them change their shape. I thought it was a beautiful, poetic horror film, utterly inoffensive — perhaps a shade long and pretentious, but a film I would defend as being entirely legitimate. I don't see where people come off saying that it's obscene! Have they buried themselves in some kind of perfumed room for the last three decades, with loads of disinfectant sprays in case the world comes anywhere near? I don't understand this! It seems to me to be very frightening that not simply sadistic pornography, of which there is a certain amount in horror films — but, you know, just straightforward, legitimate, supernatural horror films are now being


HALTED IN MID-PLUNGE, THE MASSIVE MAN-MONSTER TURNS HIS BURNING EYES UPWARD—TO STARE IN ASTONISHMENT AT THE TWISTED FORM OF HIS UNEXPECTED SAVIOR...
UUHHNN... UUHHNN...
ONE OF ARCANE'S CREATIONS... BROKEN FREE OF HIS CHAINS...!
BUT IS HE POWERFUL ENOUGH...TO PULL ME OUT OF THIS HOLE...?

The Patchwork Man, from SWAMP THING #3 (first series).

declared obscene and must be stopped for the good of this country!

The argument, apparently, is that children can watch the films, because you can just take a videocassette home. It's not the same as the cinemas where, you know, you've got to be over 18 to go in and see things that haven't been approved for kids — you can take it home where kids could get ahold of it. We don't have anything like the American R-rating which is advisory and you can take your kids in to see it if you want. Over here, either kids can see it or they can't.

ALI: *It's a bit of an anomaly, really. You can go see THE EVIL DEAD in the cinema, but you can't watch it at home on videocassettes.*

RAMSEY: That's the argument, of course: that at the cinema it can be more-or-less controlled, built in the videocassette it can't. The logical outcome of the argument, clearly, is simply that anything that's unsuitable for children, or considered unsuitable by somebody or other — heaven help us in terms of the people who are setting themselves up for these positions — will be released on cassette. The most vociferous member of the Parliamentary Committee looking into the bill that's about to become law is a chap called **Sir Bernard Braine**. He says that he doesn't feel that the British Board of Film Censors is the correct body to certify cassettes, and as evidence that they are clearly unfit he cites the film STRAW DOGS, which he describes as being filled from beginning to end with unbelievable violence. Well, the whole point about STRAW DOGS was that the violence was kept very much in check for the first two hours — this was precisely what was so *terrifying* about it when it finally did erupt! For a man who is apparently going to be responsible for which films are going to be declared suitable — to have no more correct perception of a movie than that, disturbs me very deeply!

He also says something to the effect that, again as evidence that the censor is not right for the job, that our censor sometimes allows rape to be shown. Well, yes he has, in something like **Ingmar Bergman**'s THE VIRGIN SPRING — and I should damn well hope so, too! **Bernard Braine** has actually expressed his outrage over the notion of rape being shown on cinema screens in any way at all — not merely pornographically — and that it is the mothers who are being degraded.

That's as deep a **Freudian** slip as I've heard from anybody in the government this year. Why does he think of mothers particularly? He really ought to come out and look around a bit and see that, in fact, most people around him don't quite need the kind of

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"Little did they know they were going to get

coddling that he seems to think they do. There's a kind of creeping paternalism in Britain that I find extremely worrying. It's not simply a political thing — if the government suddenly went to the left, that wouldn't necessarily change anything. Sweden, which is a socialist country, is seizing almost precisely the same films. Paternalism is on the creep, folks, and I warn you to watch out for it.

ALI: *The thing of it is that the British Board of Film Censors is an independent outfit, whereas now we have the government stepping in to say what we can watch and what we can't.*

RAMSEY: It's very worrrying. But don't let's believe for a moment that it's going to stop with videocassettes. The argument is that you can leave videocassettes around and your children can look at them. The next thing will be magazines — you can leave them around and your kids can look at them. Does it stop after that? **Anthony Burgess** actually says, from his vantage point in Monte Carlo, that no books are banned in Britain. Well, don't you believe it, mate. Quite a lot of books are already banned in Britain. You try importing a work by the **Marquis de Sade**, for example, and I think you'll find that the customs people might get quite heavy with you. More and more things are being banned in Britain.

ALI: *Okay. Let's change the pace a little. Since this is the Ramsey Campbell interview, I think perhaps we ought to talk about Ramsey Campbell's writing. You had a group of stories which I would say were EC-period pieces.*

RAMSEY: Yes.

ALI: *They are separate from the main body of your work. I'm talking about "Heading Home," in which you can actually feel Johnny Craig coming off the page. "Calling Card" is another example. There's about five, right?*

RAMSEY: "Calling Card" is odd, I think, because it's almost an **M. R. James** story told as an EC narrative. It was originally called "First Foot," but **Lin Carter** — where is he now? — who was editing WEIRD TALES, in which it was published, didn't think that American audiences were going to understand that title. It refers to a British New Year's Eve tradition where the first person to cross your threshold after midnight is considered to bring you luck.

ALI: *Wasn't this the story that was rejected by Liverpool's DAILY POST?*

RAMSEY: That's right. They wanted me to write them a Christmas ghost story. Little did they know that they were going to get a Christmas ghost story about feet dropping off on people's front doorsteps. *(Laughter.)* They ought to have looked into the kind of thing that I was likely to give them before getting something they'd reject as being too gruesome. This last year, under different editors, they asked me again to do a Christmas ghost story for them, so I sent them the same story and they published it. *(Laughter.)* "Calling Card" has the EC-ish quality of ending in a black joke. "Heading Home," as I believe I said earlier, I could almost see as a series of **Johnny Craig** panels, like the kind of thing he did in "Star Light, Star Bright" — where you've got the point of view looking up from inside the coffin. Well, you get an even more peculiar perspective in "Heading Home" — and further than that I refuse to say for people who haven't read the story.

I was trying to do very terse stories, basically, where the ending was unpredictable but which you could work out nevertheless from what had preceded it. It's like the detective story, in the sense that the reader and the writer are playing the game of who's going to get to the ending first. I think "Heading Home" was certainly one of those. I did about half-a-dozen of them in the beginning of 1974 that I think were pretty good, then I began to run out of ideas. I tried to do all of the traditional figures: The zombie, the werewolf, the mummy, the vampire, and so on. I had a lot fun doing them.

I like to set myself tasks occasionally, to do things within certain limits. In the case of these stories, it was that they should be under 2,000 words. The reason that they were written, actually, was that Marvel Comics were going to be using text stories in HAUNT OF HORROR That didn't really work out that way — but the stories were still there and eventually they were published.

ALI: *Your work seems highly personal, especially THE FACE THAT MUST DIE, and this seems to make it all the more effective.*

RAMSEY: THE FACE THAT MUST DIE is about schizophrenia, basically, although it's nominally a suspense novel about this man going mad in one of the horrible con-

RAMSEY CAMPBELL'S LIST OF MILESTONES ON THE ROAD TO HORROR

This list is a guide to some of the better works for readers unfamiliar with the genre. It is only a short guide and a lot of worthy material is of necessity missing.

Aickman, Robert	**COLD HAND IN MINE**
Barker, Clive	**THE BOOKS OF BLOOD**
Blackwood, Algernon	**BEST GHOST STORIES**
Campbell, Ramsey (ed.)	**NEW TERRORS (Vols. 1 and 2)**
Etchison, Dennis	**THE DARK COUNTRY**
	RED DREAMS
Grant, Charles (ed.)	**SHADOWS series**
Harrison, M. John	**THE ICE MONKEY**
James, M. R.	**COLLECTED GHOST STORIES**
King, Stephen	**PET SEMETARY**
Leiber, Fritz	**NIGHT'S BLACK AGENTS**
	CONJURE WIFE
Le Fanu, Sheridan	**BEST GHOST STORIES**
Lovecraft, H. P.	**THE DUNWICH HORROR and Other Tales**
	AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS
	SELECTED LETTERS
Machen, Arthur	**TALES OF HORROR AND THE SUPERNATURAL**
McCauley, Kirby (ed.)	**DARK FORCES**
Peake, Mervyn	**THE GORMENGHAST TRILOGY (3 vols.)**
Poe, Edgar Allan	**COLLECTED TALES**
Schiff, Stuart A. (ed.)	**WHISPERS series**
Straub, Peter	**FLOATING DRAGON**
Sullivan	**LOST SOULS**
Tessier, Thomas	**PHANTOM**
Wagner, Karl Edward (ed.)	**THE YEARS BEST HORROR series**
Wellman, Manly Wade	**WHO FEARS THE DEVIL?**

a story about feet dropping off on doorsteps."

crete estates where everybody's been moved to from the slums, whether they want to go or not. My mother was a schizophrenic — not the homicidal maniac sort — with the curious kind of spiral thought patterns and twists of logic that the character continually gets into — so I was writing from something I knew about. It's the one book of mine that people tend to back away from. I suppose there are people who can't take looking straight inside the head of a schizophrenic. People continually ask — more than of any other story of mine — why I decided to write it: "Why did you want to write about a mind this far out of joint?

ALI: *Is that why you wrote the introduction that came out with the American edition?*

RAMSEY: Well, I felt that the book needed to be placed in context, in a way, because of all these people always asking me about it. I thought the only way to do it was to explain where the preoccupation with schizophrenia had come from. At the same time, my mother had died the previous year. I had quite literally been unable to talk about her for the whole of my life — then there was this sense of being able to talk about it at last, although it was extremely painful to do. Exorcism perhaps isn't the word for it, but that's sort of what I was doing.

INCARNATE, which I would say is my best novel, is also about my mother in a way — although I didn't realize it at the time I was writing it. She had gone completely insane by the time I wrote it, to the extent that she was living in a totally unreal world all of the time. The most extreme thing for me was that she would ring me up and say I was in the room there with her and was extremely ill and that she was very worried and that I, being somebody else apparently, had to go there and sort things out. In retrospect, I realize that in a sense I was actually writing metaphorically about what was going on with my mother.

ALI: *The book you've just completed is called FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES. Can you tell us something about that without giving too much away?*

RAMSEY: It's about four teenagers, all of whom have apparently insurmountable problems — as one tends to have as a teenager. They all get a chance of making a pact, if you like. They all get a form that says, "Whatever you most need, I do." If they just sign this thing, then whatever they want most will be done for them. The only fee is going to be something which is of no value to them and which they may regain. They sign these things not really believing it's going to happen, but everything does, much to their retrospective panic and dismay. Nothing further happens for maybe 25 years, when the debts start to be called in,

John, Ali, and Ramsey in Liverpool, England.

which is where the body of the book begins. Although there are apparitions and hauntings in it, it's not particularly a horror novel. It's really much more a sort of moral tale about temptation and perfectly ordinary people. I am very interested in writing about perfectly ordinary people and about what circumstances can cause them to do. There is even the sense that THE FACE THAT MUST DIE is about the ordinary life of a schizophrenic.

JOHN: *You seem to have shifted your emphasis from short stories onto novels.*

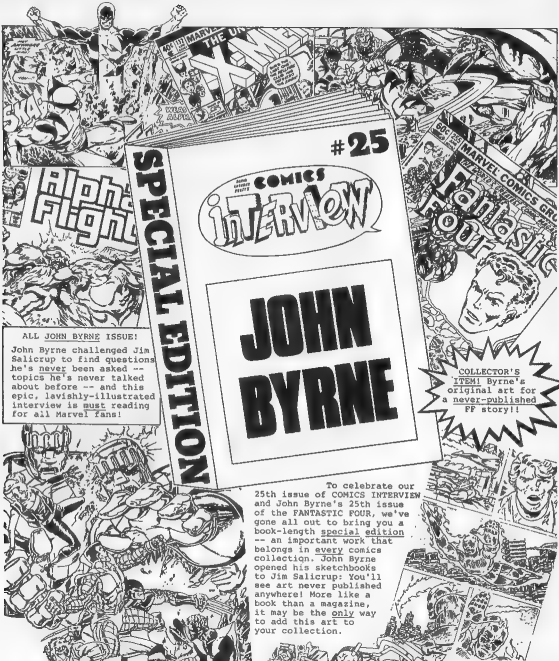
RAMSEY: Perfectly true. The reason for this is that novels tell themselves to some extent. This is what I find extraordinary about this business of writing, and it wasn't easy to find out. My first four novels, discounting the group of film adaptations, were worked out very fully in advance. I would actually have a notebook listing them chapter by chapter, with the approximate events that were going to take place, before I wrote a single word of the novel. Then I got to INCARNATE. I started writing it, and I was about 100 pages in, when the whole thing began to go off in much more interesting and quite unprepared for directions.

About halfway through I realized that I was out there in the unknown with no chapter breakdown at all to keep me going. I was now writing a book that MacMillan had not commissioned. They could quite reasonably have told me to go write what they'd asked for, but they said they actually liked it better than what I'd originally said I was going to write. Now I don't really have a chapter breakdown at all. I'm moving closer and closer to just knowing who the characters are going to be and what the initial opposition at the center of the story is going to be.

ALI: *What do you have planned for the future?*

RAMSEY: I'll be writing a novel called BLIND DARK which is going to be about this out-and-out supernatural terror. I will have a collection of my best **Lovecraftian** stories coming out with **J. K. Potter** illustrations. I'll be doing a fair number of entries for the Penguin ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HORROR, and I've been approached about the possibility of my editing an anthology of forgotten masterpieces. After that, who knows what the future may be? All I can say is that it will be frightening.

Photo: Francis Purser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LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

FLO: THAT OLD STAN LEE MAGIC

Hello, David!

Well, thank you so much for the carton of #17s that I received during the week. I am having a wonderful time distributing them, and am happily surprised to see the reaction that they are having here at ARTS MAGAZINE. Everyone wants copies — I guess they all assumed I sprang full grown from the sea 11-12 years ago when I walked in...they never realized, as one person said, that I actually had a ''past''!!!!! I am having a great time with it...

Very nice layout, I must say... looks very good. Really big photos — I hope other interviewees are not seething with jealousy over the big display... well, actually, how often do you get to use a little ''cheesecake'' in your articles. Thank goodness I look so well in the photos (well, I wouldn't have sent them if I *didn't*...).

That was quite a coup, printing out the MMMS record — don't think it's ever been done before — it reads real well, doesn't it — that old **Stan Lee** magic again!

Flo Steinberg
ARTS MAGAZINE
23 East 26th Street - Room 1114
New York, NY 10010

STAN TO FLO: BEST!

Dear David,

I enjoyed the recent issue of COMICS INTERVIEW that you sent me. The interview with **Flo Steinberg** was terrific.

If you should happen to be in touch with her, please be sure to give her my best.

Good luck, as always, in your endeavors. Excelsior!

Stan Lee
Marvel Productions Ltd.
6007 Sepulveda Blvd.
Van Nuys, CA 91411

FLO AND HER LEGS

Dear DAK,

Thanks for the copy of issue #17 — I liked the layouts on the **Willingham** interview a lot. The interview had some high points, though I found myself skimming about halfway through. I'm glad **Colquhoun** finally got in: I liked his interview. On the whole, I think **Plunkett** is the best of the artists-and-writers interviews in this issue. **Grandenetti** is the most lightweight thing you've run since **Gardner Fox**.

Flo Steinberg was, for me, the highlight of the issue. The inclusion of the MMMS script was a stroke of genius: that sidebar alone, to me, ''made'' the issue. And the picture of Flo and her legs really caught my eye. Your caption on page 73 was great.

On the whole — a pretty good issue of COMICS INTERVIEW.

Bill Chadwick
801 Myrtle Street
Atlanta, GA 30308

"VOLUNTARY" CENSORSHIP UNDER RISK OF GOVERNMENT ACTION!

Greetings.

Regarding **T.M. Maple's** comments — and DAK's harsh reply about ''intolerable'' censorship in Canada — in COMICS INTERVIEW #19, I feel that I'm in a position to put this ''newsworthy'' event in proper perspective.

I am the manager of a Toronto comic shop and, in this position, I was truly privy as to the facts about this matter.

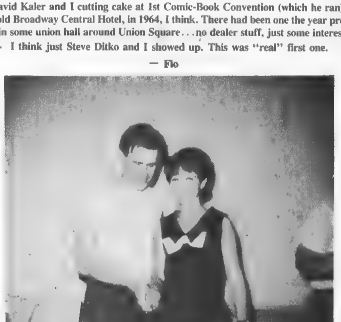
The true facts about the VOID INDIGO ''border incident'' are that a custom's official examined *one single copy* of the graphic novel, questioned the subject matter and decided to impound *one single copy* and send it to Ottawa, our capital, for bureaucratic assessment. That assessment has still not been made to this day — and probably never will.

Mr. Maple — and many others in Toronto fandom — are reacting to the disappearance of the INDIGO graphic novel off the shelves of local comic shops. This move on the part of shopkeepers was done totally *voluntarily* on the recommendation of the distributor who had had the copy at the border impounded. This distributor had sent out a warning (and rightfully so) to their accounts that *if* the INDIGO graphic novel was assessed and declared obscene by the government officials the shops would be risking legal action. This distributor then offered a full refund for any unsold copies their accoutns still had in stock.

To sum up, the INDIGO graphic novel was not banned! But — even more controversially — the book was voluntarily removed from comic shelves in part because of the threat of legal action aw well as, in part, because of the distaste shop-owners felt in selling an explicit book that was not stamped with a warning about ''mature'' subject matter.

David Kaler and I cutting cake at 1st Comic-Book Convention (which he ran) at the old Broadway Central Hotel, in 1964, I think. There had been one the year previous in some union hall around Union Square... no dealer stuff, just some interested fans. I think just Steve Ditko and I showed up. This was "real" first one.

— Flo



The distributor also decided not to carry the INDIGO comicseries because of the legal threat — but also as a sincere protest to Marvel for their irresponsible behavior in marketing such a book.

Also please note that the distributor's voluntary actions did not mean that comic shops could not obtain INDIGO (either graphic novel or Epic Comic) from other distributors in Canada. In fact, our shop ordered the Epic series from another distributor after it became clear that the border incident was just an idle threat. I still did not like selling the INDIGO comic and I was tempted to join our distributor in his protest to Marvel, but, ultimately, I found it hard to face our customers who were asking if we would carry the Epic comic. I had no right to interfere with their right to purchase and judge the book for themselves.

While on the subject of this dilemma over "warning labels"on comics may I request that COMICS INTERVIEW ask more of its interviewed subjects about this matter so that the industry can work to some consensus. As a retailer, I am amazed at how DC puts out books like VIGILANTE which varies from issue to issue as a "kid's hero" to an "adult's hero." For God's sake DC — make up your mind!

David Darrigo
Manager, Dragon Lady Comics
#1/14 Anglesey Blvd.
Islington, Ontario
CANADA M9A 3B3

CENSORSHIP IS DESIRABLE

Dear David,

As usual, #19 was interesting, intriguing, and informative. And also as usual, it wasn't perfect. (But wouldn't the world be a dull place if we were all perfect? Nice, but dull.) For instance in **Arn Saba's** vital statistics, he said that his residence is "Toronto, Canada (under protest)". I wish someone had asked him to expand on that. I mean, is he being held prisoner here or what?

In the **Bolland** interview, I was interested to read that IPC nixed the BATMAN/JUDGE DREDD get-together because they questioned the popularity of Batman. Relatively speaking, Batman might be more popular in the UK than he is in the US — at least, he regularly places high on the list in the Eagle Awards "favourite character" category. But, of course, that's "just fans" (as "outsiders" so often say.)

In the lettercol you published a letter from me which dealt with Canada Customs' seizure of VOID INDIGO as "obscene material." Part of your reply, David, seemed to be saying that some of my statements indicated that I was washing my hands of the whole matter. Well, firstly I would say that the mere fact that I wrote to COMICS INTERVIEW about the matter shows that I was trying to do *something* about it. (Canadians generally hate being embarrassed in the US.) However, I feel that you might have misinterpreted some of what I said. When I said, "I was not really in a position to judge" about VOID INDIGO, I meant simply that since I had not seen it, I could not truthfully say how I would characterize (or categorize) it. When I said that "greater minds than mine have debated this matter at length to little or no avail," I was merely trying to say (though perhaps a little vaguely) that we were not going to solve the entire issue of obscenity in one letter or in a battle about one comic book. And also, you must remember (and as I partially pointed out in the letter) that censorship is much tighter (and more popular) here than in the States. This is particularly true of imported material, probably largely because customs laws are easier to apply than criminal laws on obscenity. Thus the matter of censorshop seems more intractable (and more threatening) here than it probably does to you.

Let me give you two examples from the current newspapers. Firstly, in a community 75 miles wast of Toronto there is a movement afloat to ban certain books from the high school curriculum: the ever-popular CATCHER IN THE RYE by **J.D. Salinger**, plus several books by the recently-deceased award-winning Canadian author **Margaret Lawrence** (including one in which a woman has an "affair" with a bear). Secondly, the TORONTO STAR is

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currently running a series on how the Toronto Police, RCMP, Ontario Provincial Police and the FBI ran a sting operation to prevent one of Times Squares' major porn merchants from expanding into Toronto. His business may be seemy and disreputable in New York, but it is illegal here. Thus, the situation is a little different here, though that does not mean it is a *good* situation with respect to comics!

In your reply, David, you say "It's ludicrous to allow governments or anyone else the self-appointed power to censor." Much as I believe in the freedom of speech and expression, I think you've overstated the case. Firstly, in a free and democratic society, I don't think it's fair to characterize government or government commissions as "self-appointed." All governments are responsible to the people and must renew their mandates. Secondly, and more importantly, I think there are situations in which censorship is desirable. For instance — do you believe that we should allow "snuff" films and child pornography. Certainly, you may feel that current censorship is too tough and unfair, but I don't think this means that censorship is *never* to be invoked.

T.M. Maple
Box 1272 - Station B
Weston, Ontario
CANADA M9L 2R9

You know what they say, T.M. — people get the government they deserve. You are aiding and abetting this behavior by attempting to mitigate it. No amount of democratic opinion in favor of a wrong makes it right. A consensus on the part of victims to tolerate or even sanction criminal activity does not confer upon crime the mantle of morality, it merely institutionalizes a cowardly failure of reason and will.

Your argument that curtailing freedom of the press is the way to control snuff films is faulty. It's another variation on the misguided notion that the way to prevent drunken driving is to outlaw alcohol, and all other variations of that theme. It is the inevitable result of an attempt to shift responsibility for individual actions to "society" — which is to say, the government — and an open invitation to intellectual slavery and a police state.

The solution is not to transgress every person's freedom in the name of "justice for all" — but to hold individuals responsible for their actions. In short, T.M., shutting down the newspapers is not the way to prevent bad news.

– DAK

GOOD FEELINGS ABOUT COMICS

Dear Dave,

Issue #17 was another good issue, one you can be proud of. I hope you got the name of **Joe Colquhoun**'s interviewer right, as the Brit-fan I know is called **Stephen Oldman** (unless I've mis-transcribed it on my old subscription records), but as usual, and unlike the commentary zines, one comes away from an issue of COMICS INTERVIEW not just wiser, but entertained, with good feelings about our favorite hobby. You don't just interview the Big Guys; your format allows such a delight as Fabulous Flo revisited, the marvelous and meticulous **Joe Colquhoun**, the spooky individual **Jerry Grandenetti**, the slow but intriguing **Sandy Plunkett**, and **Russ Manning**'s "other half" for so many years, **Gaylord Dubois** Long may you continue to do so!

Martin Lock
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BOY: THE SHE-HULK NO!

Dear Dave,

I was delighted to see ZOT! in COMICS INTERVIEW. It's one of my favorite comcs — not only that, but my kids like having me read it to them. The voices of the various characters are better than the voices in *any* current comic (and that's something that you don't find out unless you read it out loud).

And speaking of COMICS INTERVIEW, I think you run a top-notch magazine, but I've stopped reading the letter column. While I'm supremely indifferent to the worth of the She-Hulk as a character, I find myself growing increasingly hostile to her as a topic of conversation. Don't you get letters about anything else?

Don Markstein
3433 W.Sierra Vista Drive
Phoenix, AZ 85017

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DUTTER: STALE & TIRESOME

Dear Dave,

COMICS INTERVIEW #19 was another great issue with interesting conversation. Nineteen issues and I haven't disliked one nor have I been bored by one yet — so you must be doing something right!

The interview with **Arn Saba** was very interesting indeed. I've been told that NEIL THE HORSE was a fine comic by many of my friends at the local comic store, and guess what. They were right! I enjoyed it very much and the art brought back memories of the old **Walt Disney** cartoons — very nice!

Now the **Bolland** interview was what I have been waiting for! Another thing that I like about your magazine is the artwork you present with each interviewed artist (like **Bolland's** cover from GREEN LANTERN #127, Brian's first published DC work). Besides doing a JUDGE DREDD/BATMAN comic (if it ever comes about) I'd love to see a **Brian Bolland** GREEN LANTERN graphic novel. GREEN LANTERN happens to be one of my favorite characters at DC and having **Brian Bolland** illustrate a graphic novel, well. . . ! Also, I can't wait to see Brian's Munden's Bar story for GRIMJACK which (I hope) should be out in the next few months. His facial and hand gestures are much appreciated!

Don & Maggie Thompson: what can you say. They've been around for years and I used to look forward to "Beautiful Balloons." Then in 1982, I let my BUYER'S GUIDE subscription run out and never renewed it until I got a letter from Don & Maggie asking me to renew. So after two years I've resubscribed and I'm happy to be part of the growing clan of the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE once again. And this time, I am sticking around for a few years.

Thank God — no letter concerning the She-Hulk by **Barry Dutter** in this issue. I am afraid that **Mr. Dutter's** letters of comment are getting a bit stale and very tiresome. Barry, you are free to express your views, but does it have to be the same subject, letter after letter?

Kenneth McFarlane
P.O. Box 454
Newmarket, NH 03857

FE FI FOGLIO

Dear Sirs,

How about an interview with **Phil Foglio**?
Michael DePoorter
Route 1 Box 930
Niceville, FL 32578

Good question! And a good opportunity to segue into what's coming up in our very next issue . . . see you there!

—DAK

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NEXT ISSUE: The MYTH-ADVENTURES of fan favorite PHIL FOGLIO! Artist NEIL YOKES of Comico's ROBOTECH/MACROSS and CARL MACEK, producer of the US syndicated TV series, spill the inside story of Japanese comics, American-style. Plus a controversial conversation with Eclipse editor-in-chief CAT YRONWODE, and lots more — all in the next issue of COMICS INTERVIEW!

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